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THE PROPHET:

A STORY

Of the Two Kingdoms of Ancient Palestine.

BY L. O. LOOMER.



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
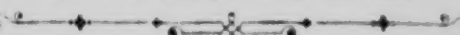

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PREFACE



Little is known of the prophet Amos, except what may be learned from his own recorded prophesy. However, a good deal of information bearing upon the times in which he lived may be gathered from other sources. Where historical information fails, I have employed to the full the novelist's license of free imagination in constructing both the situation and the story. Among other things, it is left for our imagination to account for the culture which was necessary for the production of so excellent a piece of literature. The story which is told in the following chapters gives him an experience which might qualify him for such a work.

THE PROPHET.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME IN TEKOA.

TEKO A of Judea, was a thickly settled village or small town. Among its inhabitants there were a number of wealthy shepherds, who owned extensive flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. The sheep were pastured on the Eastern hills, which bordered the wilderness of Tekoa: while the cattle were pastured on the more productive soil extending further to the west. The situation was important, being located on a highway of travel from the South Country to Jerusalem and the East. The village occupied the summit of an isolated hill, from which one might look down to the highway on the western side and see an occasional caravan passing to or from Bethlehem or Jerusalem. Several elegant residences of wealthy traders adorned the village. Perhaps the most imposing feature was a

sturdy rampart, which occupied the southeastern corner of the village, and frowned toward the wilderness and toward Edom. Owing to its position on the outskirts of the habitable kingdom, Tekoa had for a couple of centuries been an important military station, and now, in the latter days of Amaziah the king, it was guarded by a small garrison.

The point to which our attention is now to be directed is a scene on the side of the hill, as it slopes gently away from the village. There rises before us a neat but humble cottage on the outskirts of the village, several adjoining buildings of rougher workmanship, and a grove of sycamore trees extending further down the hill.

Under the shade of a large tree, an old man is resting upon the ground and watching the movements of two children who are gathering sycamore figs into baskets. The man was, perhaps, not more than sixty-five years old, but aged beyond his time by toil and trouble. The boy was about twelve, and the girl hardly ten. A dozen large baskets, already filled, stood waiting to be carried to the storehouse. The old man cast a glance

over the tree and spoke to the children,—

“Ramah, you and Jakorath had better stop gathering, and wait until some baskets are emptied. Amos will need the other empty basket on the upper branches.”

Just then a branch shook vigorously overhead and down tumbled a shower of ripe figs.

“One basket is hardly enough to hold all that are on the tree,” spoke a voice from among the branches, “but I’ll shake the rest.”

The leaves moved again, and a young man drew back from amongst the outer thicket of leaves and stood on a large horizontal branch. The basket on his arm was full of figs, and he lowered it by a cord to the ground. The boy removed it and tied an empty basket in its stead. The top of the tree was soon stripped of its ripe figs and the basket lowered to the ground. Amos then stood on one of the highest branches and looked away to the eastward, toward the wilderness.

The old man observed the direction of his gaze with interest and said, “Do you see the flock and Boz?”

"Yes, I see them," Amos replied. "Boz is grazing the sheep well down toward the ravine. The pasture must be getting short on the hills."

"Yes," returned the old man. "We must divide the flock before long." Then turning to the boy, "Ramah, take the provisions and start. Your mother will have the basket ready now, and you must be at the fold when your father brings in the sheep. You will stay with him all night, as usual, and come back in the morning."

The boy, who had been trained to instant obedience by the vigorous treatment of his parents, made no answer but started for the cottage, and in a little while was on his journey. The distance to the fold was about three miles.

Amos, who had come down from the tree, was standing by his father in a contemplative attitude. It might be easily seen from his outward appearances that he was a young man of uncommon qualities. Honesty, boldness, vigour, intelligence, and kindness were visible in his countenance. There was more of refinement and gentleness in his manner than was usual among men of

his class. His frame was well-proportioned, his limbs were free in their motion, and when he spoke his words and manner betrayed qualities which might ripen into a high grade of oratorical excellence.

Amos was the youngest son of Ben-Or, the aged man by whose side he was now standing. Boz, the eldest son of Ben-Or, was watching the flock, over by the border of the wilderness. Amos was twenty-two years of age and Boz was eleven years his senior. Two other children had been born to Ben-Or, a boy and a girl, who were, by order of age, between Boz and Amos. But their places were recently made vacant in the family circle, and the household was plunged in a double mourning.

The story is briefly told. Joab, the second son, was of a passionate disposition, strongly attached to his sister and to the other members of the household, but his quick temper sometimes caused a jarring note in the little household. Ruth was the darling of the family. As she grew up she so thoroughly imbibed the affectionate spirit which pervaded the family circle, that it modified and beautified her whole being. Not

even a passing stranger could fail to mark, in her robust beauty, the gentle, kindly disposition which manifested itself in her every action. Her brothers almost worshipped her, and would willingly lay down their lives for her, if occasion required it.

On one day, when Joab was busy with his father pruning the sycamores, Ruth set out with a basket to carry food to Boz and Amos, who were watching the flocks. She left home in a merry mood, without the faintest suspicion of danger, but she never reached the fold. The next morning, Amos walked home for provisions and it was learned of their sister's disappearance. For a moment, the family was paralyzed with horror. Then Joab broke the spell and rushed madly toward the ravine in search of her. Amos, with more presence of mind, went to the garrison, and a search party was sent out. The old father, dazed by the shock, took his staff and followed them, hardly knowing what he did.

It was found that a small party of horsemen, with the hoofs of their horses muffled, had passed from the south at night along the edge of the wilderness, and, when morn-

ing broke, had hidden among the rocks of the wilderness. Their purpose may have been to spy out the country, or to plunder the outlying sheepfolds, but it was probable that the leader of the party, on finding fairer booty, hastened away to make it secure.

On finding such indications the first thought was of Arabs: but a horseman soon dashed up from the south and announced that during the night several villages of the border had been sacked and burned, and that the plunderers escaped across the valley into Edom. Another post followed, who announced that an army of Edomites was preparing to invade.

Judea rose in arms. The trouble was not unexpected, and in two days the host of king Amaziah was on the march. As it proceeded southward, it was joined by several thousand, who gathered from the surrounding country. Joab and Amos girded on their swords and joined the host with a view to rescuing their sister, or, if that were impossible, of avenging her.

The campaign was brief and bloody. Two fiercely fought battles broke the power of Edom and exposed the land to pillage

and slaughter. The king of Edom was subjected to tribute and the hosts of Juda returned home.

But Joab was not with the returning host. He fell in the first fight. Amos was borne home in a helpless condition, his left shoulder broken by a spear-thrust, and his leg pierced by an arrow.

The sickness of Amos had been long and tedious. A fever, which seized him shortly after he was carried home, brought him even to the valley of the shadow: but thanks to the skill and care of his sister-in-law, Pennebokerath, and of his father, Ben-Or, his recovery, though long delayed, had been complete. By the time when the scene under the sycamore occurred, his lameness was wholly gone, and his shoulder had so far recovered that he could use his left arm with almost as much ease and vigour as in former days.

Amos broke off from his meditation and spoke to his father. "Yes, the flock must be divided. I am thoroughly recovered now, and must join Boz without any further delay. We will divide the flock and I will lead my division further to the north. Per-

haps on the morrow morning, I had better begin my shepherd's work anew. My sheep will have almost forgotten me, but I can soon sharpen their memories. I will tend the flock for a time, but you know what I purpose to do. As soon as Edom is quieted so that a son of Juda can enter the land, I will search it from end to end. It may be that the king of Edom has not made an honest search for Ruth. Those foreigners seldom fail to deal treacherously with the children of Abraham."

Amos ceased speaking and passed into a melancholy meditation. Then he looked down at his father. There had come over the old man's face the expression of anguish which had been seen there so often of late; and Amos knew that his thoughts were upon his beloved daughter, of whom he had been so mysteriously bereft.

"It is a dark prospect," said Ben-Or at last. "All the other captives taken at the same time, have been found and sent back; but the official report tells that no trace has been found of Ruth. Arad, the merchant, has become discouraged. I am told that he even persuades his son to think of espousing

another girl. You, know, several years ago they were anxious for him to choose little Dinah."

"Enoch-Benarad will never do that," returned Amos, in a decided tone.

"I have heard that too," said Ben-Or. "Penebokerath says that the whole village is talking of it. They say the boy declares that, if he cannot find Ruth, he will never marry."

"I heard him say so only yesterday," returned Amos.

Ben-Or spoke without looking up or changing his facial expression. "Man is but dust. Human frailty never knows its own weakness. I am old, my son. I have known many such resolutions. They are made in hot blood, but are easily forgotten when the blood cools."

"I am afraid, my father, that you do not know my friend, Benarad. As you know, he and I have been companions from childhood, and I never knew him to abandon a resolution, even though it were made, as you say, in hot blood. Moreover, in this, I know that he will be firm."

"The will of Jehovah be done," replied

Ben-Or. "The actions of men and of nations are under the control of a higher power. As we have often done before, so must we do now. We must commit our cause to Jehovah. The eye of the Lord sees everywhere. He knows the story of my beloved child. 'Though I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me.' I have been thinking for some time. No, Amos, you must not begin the care of the flock on the morrow—not until we have fully committed our Ruth to the care of Jehovah, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. You must go to Jerusalem and take offerings to the Temple."

"I will go tomorrow, then," replied Amos. "To-night I will go to the fold and bring home the animals for the sacrifice."

The little girl, Jakorath, who had retired to the cottage after her brother, Ramah departed, was now returning with an empty basket. She set herself to gather up the remaining figs, which were scattered over the ground, while Amos applied himself to the task of carrying the large baskets, which

were full, to the storehouse. The old man took his staff and walked slowly toward the cottage.

They were all together again around an early evening meal, which had been hastily prepared by Penebokerath, the wife of Boz and mother of the two children, Ramah and Jakorath. The projected journey to Jerusalem was discussed, and plans were being made concerning the sacrifice to be offered at the Temple. The meal was only well under way when the door opened quietly and in walked a young man. His intrusion was without ceremony, and his manner that of one who was familiar, and who felt as much at home in the household as the members of the family themselves. The four who were assembled at the supper, showed no surprise, but a good deal of genuine pleasure, as they greeted the young man cheerfully, and made room for him to join them around the evening meal. He accepted the offer and acknowledged the courtesy with a grace which betrayed such culture as might be found among the wealthy neighbours in Tekoa and other Judean towns. But his garments were of simple homespun wool, like those of Am-

os. In fact, they were the product of the industry of Penebokerath and of Ben-Or, who usually assisted his daughter-in-law at the spinning and weaving. The newcomer was of medium height, and, while not being slightly built, his figure was, perhaps, a little below the average in stoutness. His face showed all the marked characteristics of his race. The rapidity with which his countenance lighted up with pleasure and then passed again into sadness showed a mood which responds readily to outward circumstances, and yet, there was unusual firmness and stability stamped on his features.

There is little need to mention the name of this interesting intruder. The reader will already have guessed that he was Enoch-Ben-arad. His father, Arad, was a wealthy trader, who occupied one of the elegant residences in Tekoa. Amos and Enoch-Ben-arad had, while children, become strongly attached to each other. They had played together when very small, because their homes were in close proximity. As they grew up, each found in the other's nature so much that was kindred to his own that their attachment grew stronger with the years. It was this

fortunate companionship which gave Amos an opportunity to acquire more intellectual and social culture than would otherwise have been possible for him. Amos did not share all the educational advantages of Enoch-Benarad, but his keener intellect and more retentive memory enabled him to better assimilate the material for intellectual culture, which he was able to glean from his familiarity with the family of Arad.

There is no need to dwell at length upon the relation which came to exist between Enoch-Benarad and Ruth. They were thrown together by circumstances which have already been described; and, as they grew to maturer years they naturally learned to love each other. The parents of Enoch-Benarad, seeing that such an issue to their attachment was inevitable, and knowing the qualities of Ruth, offered no serious resistance to their betrothal.

After the sudden and somewhat mysterious abduction of Ruth, Enoch-Benarad was almost insane with grief. Through the medium of the officer in charge of the garrison at Tekoa, Arad the merchant had the case brought to the attention of king Amaziah.

A royal message was sent to the king of Edom demanding that Ruth be found and sent back to her home. Arad offered a hundred shekels of gold for her return. But, after a long and tedious delay, an answering message was received from the king of Edom, which expressed his regrets that satisfaction could not be rendered, and which stated that, although diligent search had everywhere been made, no trace of the girl could be found. Arad the merchant had abandoned hope of her recovery, and even her father, Ben-Or, was thoroughly discouraged; but the young men were determined not to give up without a struggle and they were ready, if occasion required, to take their lives in their hands. Enoch-Ben-arad vowed that, if Ruth should not be recovered, he would never marry.

After Enoch-Benarad was seated by the side of Amos, he was told of the projected journey to Jerusalem and of the sacrifice which was to be offered at the Temple on the morrow. Recalled to the sad subject of thought, which had occupied his mind of late, a shadow passed over his countenance, which had been momentarily lighted up with

pleasure at the cheerful greeting. In a few words he expressed his sincere approval, and then sat quietly thinking. The others, too, were for the most part silent, except for an occasional remark. Then Enoch-Benarad turned to Ben-Or and spoke: "You are right, my father, that without the favor of Jehovah we can do nothing. I feel it more and more now. May God forgive my rebellious mood. I was crazed with grief. Jehovah seemed so harsh and cruel that I hated Him. I was raving when I said that Jehovah was no better than foreign gods. My sin is upon me. How can I be forgiven?"

"I am afraid," replied Ben-Or, "that none of us are upright. It is indeed a great sin to think and speak thus of Jehovah. Such thoughts do not spring out of a pure heart. You were thoughtless of Jehovah before the trial came, or you would not have fallen in that way. This trial may be a fire to purify our hearts. Let us remember now that our Jehovah is a merciful God. You know the song which we have often sung together, when Ruth was with us:

"Jehovah is merciful and gracious;
Slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness.
He will not always chide:
Neither will he keep his anger forever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins,
Nor rewarded us after our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is his lovingkindness toward them that fear
him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far hath He removed our transgressions from us.
Like as a father pitieth his children,
So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him,
For He knoweth our frame,
He remembereth that we are dust.

"I am thinking," said Enoch-Benarad,
"that I must offer a sacrifice for myself.
Perhaps Jehovah will forgive me and help us
to find Ruth. I must think to-night what
my offering will be."

After the meal, the little party dispersed.
Enoch-Benarad went to his home. Ben-
Or proceeded to the care of a few she-goats,
which were kept to supply the household
with milk and cheese. Amos prepared to go
to the fold. In order to bring the sacrificial
animals, a single ox, the only beast of bur-
den which the family possessed, was harnes-
sed into a cart.

The sheep had been brought into the fold and the door was shut. Boz and Ram-ah were partaking of their evening repast, when the clatter of wheels was heard. Boz stepped around the fold to see what was coming, and lo, to his surprise, he saw Amos driving up at an ox-trot. On hearing an expression of wonder from his father, Ram-ah came forward, too, and both awaited the oncoming vehicle.

Boz was less zealous in matters of religion than his father and Amos, but, on learning of the purpose of this unexpected visit, he agreed that it was quite proper to offer a sacrifice. He expressed himself in a business-like way, which betrayed his lack of interest in religion. "We can afford to lose a lamb from the flock. It will do no harm at any rate." Boz was generous toward his father and Amos, but his interest in things hardly extended beyond his flock and his family. His mother had been careful to give him a religious training: but she died when he was a boy; and his subsequent life had been spent with the flock, and religion had almost become a "dead letter" in his life.

"Our father thinks," said Amos, "that

the sacrifice ought to be so large that we will feel the loss. Perhaps it will move Jehovah to care better for our sister. Our father thinks that the offering ought to be two of the finest rams, a ewe and a lamb from the flock, and a kid from the field. There is only one kid this season, but our father is anxious to offer that one to Jehovah. Besides these, the offering is to include a basket of the finest fruit from the storehouse."

"What our father Ben-Or says must be done," said Boz, "but we never offered so much before. Will nothing less do?"

"We have a great cause to commit to Jehovah," answered his brother. "It is from the agony of our father's heart and of ours that the prayer is to be made. We must not scruple to give, where we ask so much."

Boz made no answer, but opened the door of the fold. The animals were soon caught and bound and placed in the cart, and Amos was on his way home.

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CHAPTER II.

AT THE TEMPLE AND IN THE FIELD.

THERE had been unusual quiet in Jerusalem. For several weeks the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle had not been heard in the Temple courts. Only the sacrifice of a few doves and an occasional offering of fruit had broken the monotony. The officiating priest at this time was Ahiah, a venerable man with grey hair and a white beard, and a kind and intelligent face. He was sitting in his usual place in the Temple porch, reading slowly the story of David from the book of Samuel, and meditating upon it. Then he became lost in thought and began speaking slowly, or, as it seemed, thinking audibly, in a low voice. "A hero and a man after God's own heart!—But how long, long ago! Oh that Jehovah would raise up a man in these later days! The people are forgetting Jehovah and his house and his law." He stopped speaking and looked around sadly upon the empty court. He tapped the floor with his

foot, and heard the echo resounding through the empty house.

Just then a rapid step was heard in the outer court, and a man entered the Temple enclosure. Enoch-Benarad had seen Ahiah a number of times and recognized him at once, but was himself unknown to the priest. He walked more slowly and approached the altar in a reverent attitude. Ahiah rose and came forward to meet him. "You worship at an unusual hour," remarked the priest. "Are you a stranger in the city."

"I am the son of Arad of Tekoa," returned Enoch-Benarad. "Jehovah has sent a great calamity upon me. Myself and my friends, who share the affliction with me though not the guilt for which it was sent, wished to make a sacrifice to Jehovah, if, perchance we might regain his favour and his help."

"Jehovah is always ready to forgive those who truly repent," said the priest. "You do well to go to him in your trouble. I wish all the people might remember him. It may be that Jehovah will send a great national disaster upon this people, for their forgetfulness of him and his law. Will you

come into the porch of the Temple and talk to me of your trouble and of what you wish Jehovah to do for you?"

Enoch-Benarad, finding in the priest a sympathetic hearer, unfolded to him the whole story of his loss and placed in his hand the offering which he brought. It was the piece of very precious jewelry with which he had intended to decorate his bride upon their wedding day. Now, he was offering it in the Temple, with the prayer that Jehovah keep and restore to him again the object of his heart's affection.

Ahiah examined the offering carefully, and then said: "It is worth a great deal of money; I will take part of its value and buy a heifer for your sacrifice, and will put the rest into the Temple Treasury." He rang three times with a hammer on a piece of metal, which lay at his feet. In a little while a door, which led into the chambers, opened and a Levite came out and stood before the priest. Ahiah gave him money and instructed him to go to the cattle market and to buy a heifer and bring it to the altar.

After the departure of the Levite, Ahiah discoursed of the wonderful things which Je-

hovah had done for the chosen people, of the Patriarchs, and of Moses, and of David, of the prophets of old, Elijah and Elisha. He expressed his sorrow that worship at the present time was at so low an ebb, that prophecy had become so degraded that there seemed to be not a single genuine voice of God to speak to the people.

The musical flow of his words was interrupted by the rough rattle of an approaching cart. It stopped by the gate of the outer court and Amos stepped from the cart and walked into the enclosure. He was introduced to the priest by Enoch-Benarad. Ahiah greeted him kindly, and, with genuine sympathy in his manner and voice, spoke of the trouble which had occasioned the present visit.

They at once proceeded to prepare the sacrifice. Ahiah brought the wood for the burnt offering, and arranged it upon the altar, while the young men led in the animals. With the help of Amos and Enoch-Benarad the animals were slaughtered in the usual way. The animal was hung by its hind legs over a marble basin, which was set in the stone floor near the altar. The neck of the

animal was held so that the blood poured into the basin. From thence it was carried off by a pipe into a sewer. The water from a fountain, which was constantly playing into the basin, carried off the blood and kept the basin clean. As the blood flowed, a few drops were sprinkled upon the altar.

The portion of flesh for the burnt offering was removed and laid upon the altar, and the fire was kindled. As the wood began to burn and the fire reached the offering, the two young men prostrated themselves upon the ground. The aged priest, as he stood by the altar, bowed his venerable head, and, while the smoke of the offering was ascending toward heaven, he lifted his voice and in passionate eloquence offered a prayer to Jehovah, pleading for the pardon of the sins and the prosperity of the cause of those who were worshipping with him. The fire died upon the altar, and, as the young men rose from the ground, Amos felt a calm come over his spirit and the burden of his sorrow was for a time removed. Enoch-Benarad, too, was powerfully impressed with the nearness of Jehovah, and, for the time, he dared

to hope that Jehovah would restore Ruth to him again.

When this ceremony was over, the Levite, who was waiting without, brought in the heifer which was sacrificed in a similar manner. In the second prayer which was offered by Ahiah, there was something, which left an indelible impression on the mind of Amos. Before the close of the prayer the priest cried out with startling earnestness, pleading that a man might be raised up from among the sons of Abraham, with a true spirit of inspiration, and that Jehovah might, even yet, again speak to his people through a prophet.

On the following morning Amos joined his brother at the fold to resume his shepherd's duties. The part of the flock that he was used to lead had so long been unaccustomed to the sound of his voice that, as was anticipated, some difficulty was found in inducing them to follow him. Two cords were stretched across the fold to serve as a fence. The sheep which Amos was to lead were placed on the side furthest from the door, so that they could not pass out when the door was opened. The door was opened

and Boz led his flock from the fold, and away, until they passed over a ridge and out of sight. The door was closed again after they had passed out. Amos removed the cordage fence and went around amongst his sheep to renew their acquaintance. He called each sheep by name as he approached it, patted it on the neck, and spoke in a familiar way. The dumb brutes, although they could not understand the meaning of the words, knew that there was kindness in the tone of voice. In the thick sense of those dumb brutes, associations of former days re-awakened, and, when the door was opened again, every sheep was as ready to follow Amos as if he had never been absent from them. He led them towards the north about half a mile, to a patch of ground, which had not been grazed over during that season.

The wilderness of Judea was a barren desert of hills and rocky ravines, bare of vegetation, the dwelling place of wild beasts and birds of prey. The shepherd could never leave the flock, even for a short time, for the smaller beasts of prey, such as the jackal and the wild dog, were a constant danger to the sheep. A few wolves also roamed the

wilderness. These would seldom venture to attack a human being by day, and the presence of the shepherd with his flock was sufficient to keep them away. As a general thing, the shepherd needed no weapon as a defence against wild beasts. It sometimes happened, however, that a larger beast would cross the Jordan from the forest of Bashan and range through the wilderness of Judea. For this reason, and because of the further danger which sometimes appeared from bands of robbers, it was not thought wise for a shepherd to be entirely unarmed. In his sheepskin wallet, Amos carried an ordinary sling, which in a practiced hand was an effective weapon. His only other weapon was his staff. At one end was the shepherd's club, but fixed to the other there was a light iron spear-point. At ordinary times, the sharp point was covered by a cap, a socket of wood with a leather covering, so that it appeared to be a simple shepherd's club: but, when the cap was removed, the club was transformed into a formidable spear. At night, wild beasts were, of course, bolder and fiercer: but, as night approached, the sheep were safely secured within the fold,

and the shepherd who was on guard slept in a small mud hut, built against the stone wall, just inside the door of the enclosure.

During the uneventful days which followed, Amos, as he followed the flock, had many idle hours for thought and contemplation. A sheepskin scroll of Hebrew poetry and history he usually carried with him. He took great delight in poetry, whether it were the written poetry of the psalms, or the unwritten poetry in nature around and in the heavens above. But during these days, as he followed the flock, the scroll was largely neglected. For whole days it lay untouched. The experiences of the last few weeks gave him ample material for contemplation; and the task which now lay before him in the future furnished an even more pressing subject for thought. In undertaking to search out and to find his sister in Edom, he would be taking a step in the dark, and what the outcome might be no one could tell.

Enoch-Benarad made frequent visits to the flock, and sometimes remained with Amos during the whole afternoon. At such times, their conversation ran mainly on the projected journey through Edom. They

talked of the chances of the search. They counted the days that must pass before they could set out. Another official report was expected from the king of Edom, and the young men were hoping for a clue which might help them.

On one day, this hope was dashed to the ground. Amos was pacing back and forth on a low rolling hill and the sheep were scattered about on the lower ground, when his friend approached from the direction of Tekoa. As he came up, Amos greeted him in the usual manner.

"Peace be with you," said Enoch-Ben-arad, as he embraced Amos. "I bring bad news to-day. Another message has come from the king of Edom. He says that the whole land has been thoroughly searched and no clue has been found. He had it published all over the kingdom that one hundred shekels of gold are offered for the discovery of Ruth. A great many men joined the search, to win the reward. He thinks that, if she were in the kingdom, she surely would have been found before now."

"The outlook is certainly discouraging," said Amos. "But, though we are in the

dark, we must not forget that Jehovah is our guide. 'The darkness and the light are both alike to him.' '

"Amos, we must try ourselves. We cannot be satisfied with a foreigner's report," said Enoch-Benarad, with a determined look on his face.

"I would not think of giving up because others have failed," said Amos. "It may be that Jehovah has reserved the pleasure of the discovery for us. At any rate, we will trust him for the successful issue of our quest."

It was getting along toward evening when Enoch-Benarad returned to his home. Amos was in a thoughtful and dejected mood as he called together his flock and led them to the fold. They were watered at a spring near by, and folded for the night. After Boz had brought in his flock, he set out, as he often did when Amos was with him at the fold, to walk to Tekoa, in order to spend the evening and night with his family. Amos, thus left alone, after he had finished his evening meal, read for an hour from the scroll of sheepskin manuscript which he carried, and then lay himself down to rest for the night.

His thoughts were in such a disturbed condition that he did not readily fall asleep. As he lay on his rough bed, his thoughts kept running rapidly over the events of the last few weeks, and, without dwelling upon any one subject, they kept passing from one thing to another in such a rapid whirl, keeping up such an agitation in his mind that his brain was wearied and his head was aching. He was at last falling into a troubled sleep, when suddenly he was wide awake with the impression that he had heard an unusual sound. He sat up in bed and listened and thought that he heard light footsteps approaching the fold.

Quickly he slipped out of bed, picked up a bow from among the weapons which were lying in the hut, and a couple of arrows, and climbed noiselessly to the "lookout" on the wall. The "lookout" was a place so constructed that a man could stand and see what was going on outside, without being himself seen. Peering out in the direction from which the sound seemed to come, he saw a man standing looking over the fold. He was a stranger, and nothing could be learned from his appearance and garb, except that they were rougher than us-

ual. After the man had looked the fold over from a distance of about a hundred cubits, he came a little nearer and walked noiselessly around it. He seemed to note the position of the door and the height and structure of the wall. Then he turned and walked away in a south-westerly direction toward the fold of Arnan. It was a large fold, about a mile and a half away, which belonged to Arnan, one of the wealthy sheep and cattle raisers of Tekoa.

Amos could see the man plainly through the starlight night. He saw him stop at a distance from the fold of Arnan, and look it over in a way similar to the manner in which he had examined the fold of Ben-Or. But, as he drew nearer and was looking at the door, he jumped suddenly aside and then ran swiftly to the distance of a bow-shot from the fold. Amos conjectured that an arrow had been shot, either to wound the man or to warn him away. Then the man walked quickly away toward the south and east until he passed over a ridge. But, as soon as he was out of sight of the fold of Arnan he changed his direction and worked his way toward the north-east. Amos could see him from time to time as he made his

way among the low hills, until he was lost to sight.

It did not seem prudent to Amos to go to sleep at once, so he remained on watch. But as day was breaking he lay down to rest until his brother should arrive with food for the breakfast. Before the return of Boz, however, Amos was awakened by a call from without. At the second call he recognized the voice of a young shepherd from the fold of Arnan. The shepherd had come over to apprise Amos and Boz of the mysterious midnight visit, and to warn them that trouble might be brewing. Amos told the shepherd that he, too, had seen the stranger, and entertained the same suspicion that mischief was intended. After Boz arrived the matter was discussed at some length. It was thought to be unlikely that the mysterious midnight visitor was alone in the wilderness. But there was no clue as to how many might be with him in hiding among the rocks and caves which lay off to the east, nor as to who they were or what might be their purpose. It was decided that Boz should remain with Amos during the night, and that one should keep watch while the other slept.

On that day Amos was on the same hill

where Enoch-Benarad had found him the day before. Amos, however, possessed too active a disposition to lie upon the ground for a large part of the day, as was the habit of many shepherds. He was pacing back and forth on the top of the hill, when his attention was attracted by an unusual stir in the village of Tekoa. In a few moments, a party of men from the garrison came into view around the fortress and marched toward the wilderness. As they came nearer, Amos noticed that they were thirty men in all, and that fifteen were armed with bows and arrows and swords, and the others with spears and swords. Amos, who had seen such an occurrence a number of times, knew that it was a search-party from the garrison: and the formidable weapons which they carried suggested that the quest might be a dangerous one.

Amos walked to a place where he saw they would pass and awaited their approach. Sebat, the leader of the party, who knew Amos, halted his men, addressed Amos, and proceeded to make some enquiries. He asked if any strange men had been seen around there during the last few days. Amos, in

answer related the occurrence of the night before.

"He must have been one of the gang," said Sebat. And then he explained to Amos the occasion of the present expedition. A message had arrived from Bethlehem saying that a band of robbers, who had made themselves notorious in the region of Jerusalem, was attacked, and that some had been captured, but others escaped. They were pursued into the wilderness, but had been lost sight of. Some robberies, committed shortly after near Bethlehem, seemed to indicate the direction which the fugitives had taken; and it was believed that they were now in hiding somewhere about the wilderness of Tekoa. Their number was five when they left the region of Jerusalem, but, seen near Bethlehem, another had joined them.

Sebat was an expert at that kind of work. He knew all the caves and hiding-places for miles around, and he supposed that he could locate the position where the present gang of robbers had fixed their den.

"I believe they are in the cave yonder," he said, pointing away toward a rugged part of the wilderness. "If they are there, then, unless they have kept a watch and have seen

us coming, we have them in a trap. But we must move carefully."

"May Jehovah give you success to find the den, and prosper your arms when you meet the gang," replied Amos.

The party marched off in the direction where the leader had pointed, and were soon out of sight behind the hills.

That day Enoch-Benarad paid Amos a visit. He knew that Sebat and his men had gone out, but the purpose of the expedition had not been published in Tekoa. Enoch-Benarad was reclining at full length upon the hillside, and Amos was sitting by his side. Their conversation ran upon the robbers and upon the soldiers who had gone to hunt them.

"Well," said Enoch-Benarad, "Sebat must be up to something. He has been away a long time and we have not heard a sound. It may be, as you say, that he is surrounding the cave and preparing to surprise the robbers. With the wind as it is, we would hear some sound from a fight."

Then, as if it came in answer to the words which had just been spoken, the sound of shouting was faintly heard in the dis-

tance. The young men listened intently. Then the sound ceased.

"They have made short work of it," said Enoch-Benarad.

"Yes," returned Amos. "Sebat and his men strike with a will when they come to close quarters. It is likely that they surprised the robbers. It will be a wonder if one of the villains is alive by this time."

When the returning soldiers came in sight, it required only a moment's glance to mark that thorough work had, indeed been done. Twenty-eight men were walking and two were being carried, either dead or wounded: but there was not a prisoner. As the soldiers came up, Amos and Enoch-Benarad met them and accosted Sebat to enquire of the affair with the robbers. Sebat allowed his men to march on, but he himself stopped to relate what had taken place.


"We found them where I thought they would be," he said. "We hemmed them in as quietly as we could and almost made a complete surprise. As soon as they found us out, we made a rush, and in a little while it was all over. As you see, one of our men is killed and another has a broken leg. We killed five of the robbers on the spot where

we found them. One broke away and ran. Three of my men were right after him. They nearly had him when he turned aside and jumped over a cliff. The soldiers were in no hurry as they climbed down, for they knew that he would not run again. They found him alive, but severely injured. We hauled him up and started to carry him with us: but, at the foot of yonder hill he let us know that he was one of those swine from Edom. We dropped him on the ground and left him. The jackals will have a feast to-night." After he finished his story, Sebat hastened on to overtake his men.



CHAPTER III.

THE ROBBER.

 MOS and Enoch-Benarad looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then both said at once, "from Edom."

"We must see him," said Enoch-Benarad.

"It is a remarkable happening," said Amos. "It may be that Jehovah is already throwing light upon our way to guide us. Let us carry the man to the hut and take care of him. Who can know how much he might be able to tell about affairs in Edom. If he lives, he may be of use to us in the future."

They set off at a run toward the place where the man was left.

"We must set aside our aversion to foreigners for the time. We will be more accustomed to their company when we go into Edom," remarked Enoch-Benarad.

"I believe," returned Amos, "that Jehovah, our God, has a care over them as well as over his chosen people. Even the beasts

of the field are cared for. The Edomites are worshippers of idols and great sinners against God, but Jehovah punishes them for their sin; and the afflictions, which he sends upon them, show that he is interested to correct them. I believe that Jehovah is pleased when his people lay aside their pride and show kindness to the stranger."

"This man is not only a stranger but a robber and a murderer," said Enoch-Benarad.

"Jehovah has punished him," said Amos. "He may be dead now."

As they were coming down the hill, at a rapid walk, to where the robber lay, a groan showed them that he was yet alive. As they knelt beside him to see how badly he was hurt, he called for water. Amos had a little left in the leather bottle which he carried, and he put it to the robber's lips. Then they took him up and carried him toward the fold, resting from time to time to ease the injured man. As they passed the place where the flock was grazing, Amos called to the sheep to follow. They were unused to such an escort, but they knew the voice of Amos, and responded to the call.

The Edomite was carried into the fold

and laid upon one of the rude couches, of which there were two in the hut. Enoch-Benarad hastened to Tekoa to secure medical aid, while Amos gave his attention to the sufferer. The latter was groaning feebly, and in a whispered voice he asked for more water. Amos ran and brought some from the spring, which was near by. Then to the best of his ability, he arranged the position of the injured robber in such a way that he would rest as easily as he might: and, at the same time, he assured the latter that he would be cared for.

When Amos was bringing his sheep into the fold to secure them for the night, he noticed that Boz was coming into view, with his sheep, as usual, not so much following him as accompanying him. Boz had so far identified the welfare of his life with the welfare of his flock, and the sheep had become so strongly attached to him that, when the flock was in motion, the sheep vied with each other which should walk nearest to the shepherd. Everyone of them had, while it was yet a lamb, been carried from place to place in his arms. Boz had not a literary interest and love of contemplation, such as we have already noticed in Amos, to while

away the hours of the long day in the field. He amused himself mainly amongst the flock. He would occasionally join in the sport of the lambs. Sometimes, while resting upon the ground, he would allow the lambs to walk over his body, or they would sleep curled up at his side. The sheep were his companions, and, apart from the members of his family, they were the only companions for which he cared.

Amos went out to meet his brother, and engaged him in important conversation as they walked together toward the fold. "I have news for you to-night," he said "There will be no need for you to remain at the fold to-night. The danger which we were talking of in the morning has been removed. Have you heard anything of what has happened?"

"Ramah was out to-day," answered Boz. "He said that Sebat and his men went into the wilderness, but the people in Tekoa knew nothing more. But I can guess the rest. How many robbers?"

"Six," said Amos.

"Are they all killed?"

"Five were killed, and the other was so nearly killed that he is now in a precarious

condition. You are not surprised at that, as you say, but there is more to tell. The soldiers left the wounded man in the wilderness, but Enoch-Benarad and myself have carried him to the fold, where we mean to take care of him."

"If you mean to cheat the vultures and jackals," said Boz, "I object. They are getting hungry. A vulture hovered above the flock to-day for hours,"

"The man is from Edom," continued Amos, "and——"

He was interrupted by his brother, who broke into his speech with considerable violence. "Have you brought one of those foreign dogs into the fold? You must be beside yourself. You always had strange notions, but this seems beyond reason. We have no cause to love the Edomites. I would enjoy cutting off the swine's head."

Amos knew from long experience that it was little use to try to persuade his brother to sympathize with his own sentiments toward his fellow men. The thicker intellect and narrower sympathies of Boz seemed incapable of developing notions of universal brotherhood. He shared, with the majority of his nationality, a contempt for foreigners.

The recent war and the disaster which it had occasioned to the family of Ben-Or had greatly augmented his bitterness against anything which savored of the land of Edom. Moreover, the fact that the injured man was a robber gave equal cause for animosity. Some experiences which Boz had passed through while watching his flock in the region of the wilderness, had fostered in his mind a hatred for robbers, equal to that which he now entertained toward the Edomites. Amos made no attempt to induce any change of opinion in the mind of his brother, or any change of feeling toward the man who lay in the hut; but he simply explained that, in view of the expedition which he and Enoch-Benarad proposed to make into the land of Edom, a great deal of useful information might be gained from one man who was born and bred in that land.

"You will be wasting your time by such a journey," said Boz. "You cannot find our sister, and are likely to be killed somewhere in the land of Edom. You and Enoch-Benarad are mad, to think of making such a wild adventure. The Edomites failed to find her in their own land. How can foreigners and strangers succeed?"

Amos was accustomed to meet the matter of fact skepticism of his brother with a simple complacency of faith, which at once quieted and puzzled the unspiritual Boz, to whom the deeper religious feelings and the mystery of faith were something which he little understood or had a will to investigate.

"The eye of Jehovah sees everywhere," said Amos. "The darkest corner of Edom is as open to him as is the Temple of Solomon itself. He knows what has been the fate of our sister, and if he will, he can guide us to her. I have had a strange experience during the last few weeks. The feeling has come over me and has been growing upon me, that we will find our sister Ruth again. At times the thought comes with a mysterious subtilty and with such power that for the time I find it impossible to doubt. It was only yesterday, before Enoch-Benarad joined me in the field, that the mysterious influence came over me again, and its import seemed clearer than before. As I was musing, my contemplation was, first, upon the affairs of the morning and the expected visit of my friend from Tekoa. Then my thoughts passed to matters of religion and of human affection until Jeho-

vah's goodness, our own sinfulness and unworthiness, and my longing to see our lost sister were all commingling in my mind. My mind seemed to awaken beyond its usual intelligence and activity. Quickly there passed before me a panorama of our family life, a picture of affection and the brightness of joy, in which Ruth was the light and warmth of the household: then a darkness fell upon the picture as the light was removed from the family circle: and there came over me a sudden and a great longing to have our sister with us again. It was only a moment's duration, and then all anxiety passed suddenly away. The one thought which occupied my mind was that she will be restored. For the moment hope flashed to its full brilliancy and flooded everything with its light, and all doubt was dispelled. Then a sadness settled over my spirit, and the light of hope which had lifted me up was veiled in sadness until it was like unto a funeral taper. The experience passed away leaving a feeling of mingled sadness and hope, a sense which, while forbidding me to despair and impelling me on, drew a veil before me, leaving the future in semi-darkness, into which I could only peer a little

way. Other experiences of a similar kind have come upon me during the last few weeks while I have been alone with the flock. They must come from Jehovah, for I cannot account for them in any other way; and the one thing which they appear to teach most plainly is that Ruth will be one day restored to us; but when, and how, and by whose instrumentality is left in darkness as dense as that of Egypt."

Boz made no reply, but remained silent, as was his custom when a religious subject was brought before him in anything but a businesslike way. He sometimes spoke of Jehovah or of a religious duty, but in the same cold and feelingless manner in which he would discuss an affair of business, such as the sale of wool or a bargain in cloth. Any deep religious emotion was foreign to his nature, and he was unable to enter into sympathy with such a quality when it appeared in another of a more spiritual mind. However, he believed that there might be something real and genuine in the display of what seemed to him an unintelligible sentiment. When his father or brother spoke in a religious strain, Boz would listen in silence and make no reply.

When Amos finished his speech and marked that Boz had passed into his usual attitude of silent acquiescence, he knew that no more opposition would be made to his plans as to the care of the Edomite robber. Accustomed to his brother's moods, he understood that the silence meant an unwilling assent, or, at least, the withdrawal of all opposition.

After a rapid walk to Tekoa, Enoch-Benarad was not long in finding the man for whom he was looking; and, aided by the yellow glitter of gold, he easily persuaded him to make an immediate visit to the fold of Ben-Or, and to go prepared to bandage the bruises and to mend the broken bones of an Edomite. From among the medical men of Tekoa, it had been decided that Perisekal was the most suitable man to engage for a private and secret job. In times gone by, some dark suspicions had been whispered abroad with regard to the man's character, but he had the merited reputation for unusual skill and the further capacity for keeping a secret as close as if it were hidden in the grave. The man was spare of flesh and somewhat long in the limbs; and with black

eyes which seemed to penetrate one because of the steadiness of will with which he concentrated their gaze.

For a space of time equal to about two hours, the medical man laboured with the injured bandit. Amos, who had left his supper half eaten, rendered what little assistance he could by carrying water to bathe away the clotted blood and by little services in connection with the bandages. Besides severe bodily bruises and a few broken bones, there was a large gash in the left cheek, which looked as if it had been torn by a sharp point of projecting rock. The flesh was lacerated on either side of the gash, which was torn open to almost the length of a finger. As Perisekal adjusted the torn flesh and applied the bandages, he remarked that the man would carry a mark for life, which would identify him as far as one could see his face. "That must have been done before he reached the ground," continued the physician. It could not have happened through falling on the rocks, for the flesh around is not so badly bruised as it would be in a case like that. He seems to have been caught by a sharp point during the fall."

"Jehovah has placed his mark upon the

man," returned Amos. "It may remind him of his punishment and do something toward bringing about his reformation. At all events, if he returns to his old trade, he will be known wherever he is seen. If he comes to be known as a robber with that mark upon his face, he will never dare to appear in broad daylight so long as he lives, but only on dark nights and then not far from his den. It is to be hoped that the prospect of such a predicament will scare him into an honest path for the future."

"You forget," said the more experienced doctor, "that he may not be a regular highwayman but only an honest Edomite. While at home among his own people he may be as honest as the day. In the present state of feeling between our land and his, the Edomite would not think it a disgrace to rob the people of Judea. If he should go back with his spoil in his hand and a big story to tell of violence done in the land of Juda, the people would make him the hero of the hour. It is true that the king has sworn to keep the peace, but what is that to the people of Edom. The soldiers will wink at such a law and give their support to the man who breaks it. They will never take action in a

case like this unless they are threatened with fire and brimstone. The man's scar will only be a badge of honor there."

"There is wisdom in that," said Amos. "And as soon as the man is strong enough to talk and think freely, Enoch-Benarad and myself purpose to draw from him the story of his life, and whatever other information he can give us concerning the land of Edom. But it seems to me that the man will not have much reason to glory in the scar on his face, for he will carry home no spoil from this expedition, and he received his wound not in a fight but in a fall, and he will owe his escape not to his own skill and bravery but to the clemency of his enemies."

"That is it in plain words," said the practitioner, with a touch of humour in his voice. "That is what happened on this side of the Salt Sea. You understand the situation, but the people across the valley do not; and this Edomite will carry home, graven on his features, the groundwork upon which he can fabricate a big story."

The medical man was now holding the hand of his patient and watching his face. "He is waking up now," he said in a subdued tone. In the course of the operation,

when the pain became too severe to be borne, the doctor had administered a certain drug, which quieted the nerves and bathed the senses in oblivion. The subject of Perisekal's treatment was now waking out of his stupor. He opened his eyes and looked around in a dazed manner. Then the bewildered look was followed by a flash of intelligence as memory of what had happened came back upon him and the man was fully awake. The doctor fixed him with his eye and with a gesture checked the enquiry which he seemed about to make. "You must be quiet," said Perisekal, "and not try to move. You must not try to stir ever so little." He then explained to the suffering man the nature of his injuries, gave Amos instructions as to the care of the patient, assured them that recovery though it must be long delayed would be sure unless something unforeseen should occur, and urged upon the patient the necessity of lying perfectly quiet. He then bade them farewell, and, mounting his beast set out toward Tekoa.

Thus left alone with his patient, Amos approached the couch and, after speaking a few words of encouragement, again assured the man that he need have no fear; for he

was among those who purposed to be his friends. The man was suffering greatly from his injuries, and called from time to time for a sup of water, which was supplied by Amos from a rough earthen vessel. He managed to eat some food which Amos prepared for him from the fragments of the supper. At last, weary with watching, Amos filled his leathern bottle with water. Then he plucked a hollow twig from the structure of the hut, which he made to serve as a tube. The tube was placed by the patient's mouth and the bottle in reach of the tube, so that the man could draw water from the bottle through the tube without lifting a hand, and could thus moisten his lips from time to time without assistance. Amos then lay down on the other couch and slept.

In the morning, after Amos had given attention to the injured man, Enoch-Benarad and Boz arrived from Tekoa. It had been agreed that, until the patient should be able to help himself a little, Enoch-Benarad would remain at the fold during the day, while Amos was away with the flock. While Amos was eating some breakfast from the food which Boz had brought along with him, he related the events of the night, including

the visit of Perisekal, his treatment of the Edomite, and the directions which he left. After Amos had finished his breakfast, Enoch-Benarad took his post in the hut as nurse, while the two brothers proceeded to the discharge of their daily duties in the field.

The office of temporary nurse, which Enoch-Benarad was now taking upon himself, was one for which his natural disposition well fitted him. For a time, he could adapt himself to the tenderer services of life with the aptitude of a woman, and throw his soul into the work as if he had no other object in the world. But, in time, his inherent restlessness, like an intermittent spring, was sure to assert its authority over his mind and to call for a different scene and a more vigorous activity. Perhaps the most prominent characteristic of his life, which would impress itself upon a disinterested observer, was an appetite for activity and variety. He had not the keen insight into human motives, nor the talent for poetic and oratorical utterance, which was later developed in his friend Amos. But he had more of dash and of apparently spasmodic energy than his more calm and self-controlled friend. If a sudden predicament should arise which required

a ready wit to unravel it, Enoch-Benarad would be foremost with a suggestion. He thought more quickly, but not so deeply and truly as his friend.

But his life was not shallow. There was a hidden depth of emotion and kindly feeling, which a casual observer would almost invariably fail to see. In fact, it never appeared in his outward and visible expression unless called for by some circumstances, such as the present, of real suffering and need. But contact with intense suffering or sorrow would act as the ladle which stirs the dye to bring to the surface the beauty which was hidden within. Over the outward man and displayed to the view of the world, there was a changing disposition, a restless activity and passion for variety by which most people were deceived as to the true depth of his nature. But in the depth of his inner being there was something constant and unchanging. Like the brooklet which flowed from the spring nearby, its surface taking a million forms as it flowed, but always drawn forward by the constant force of gravity, so there was a constant power of gravity in his life, which, though invisible, kept all the

cascades and rapids and ripples and shallows within a clearly defined channel.

The novel situation in which he now found himself as nurse to an Edomite robber gave a fascination to the work, which drew the young man away from his own sorrowful thoughts and, for the time, induced a fresh and even an enjoyable mood. It was the very thing which he needed, for the morbid condition into which his late sorrow had plunged his mind was threatening to become chronic. He was thoroughly aroused. And, as from time to time he approached the injured man to perform his offices of mercy, the window of his soul was thrown open and some little glow from the natural kindness which lay hidden in his heart was allowed to shine through.

The Edomite received this attention at first with astonishment not unmingled with suspicion. In Judea he had expected to find nothing but a haughty hatred, and might not some sinister motive lie hidden beneath such a fair display of kindly feeling? But, as the days went by, the suspicion wore off and only wonderment remained.

On one day the doctor Perisekal paid his regular visit to the fold. He changed

Some bandages, went over the case and pronounced the patient to be doing splendidly, then gave new orders to the self-imposed nurse, and retired. After he was gone, the robber turned to Enoch-Benarad and asked the question which had been puzzling him for a long time. "Why is it you and your friend have been so good to me?" he asked in the dialect of the Edomites, which, by the way was strange but not unintelligible to the people of Judea.

"As for my friend," was the reply, "he is always the same to a human being or to a dumb brute. He very seldom is angry, but is always kind. It seems to be a part of his nature, which he cannot get rid of any more than he can change his skin. But as for me, I hardly know why it is. I simply feel like it now, that is all. If I had met you in the field when you were well I would have enjoyed to send an arrow through you or to hurl you over the precipice where you fell, or to do anything else which might be done: but, now that you are helpless and suffering, it seems different and I feel like being kind to you."

Thus far, the two young friends had not tried to draw the Edomite into conversa-

tion. They had, however, gathered that his name was Kur, that his home was in Tophel, and that he joined the band of robbers in the region near Bethlehem, just before they made their den in the wilderness of Tekoa. But it was now thought that the patient was strong enough to talk and to think freely without doing himself serious bodily injury. So they determined to begin to probe for any information which he might be able to impart to them. The story, which they drew from him, was given in such fragmentary form that to give a detailed account of the laboured process by which it was obtained would exhaust the patience of the reader.



CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT EDM.

THE city of Tophel was as large and about as populous as Samaria. At that time, the king of Edom had his headquarters in the city, and, in view of the unsettled condition of the times, it was fortified and strongly garrisoned. The house in which Kur dwelt, in so far as he dwelt in a house at all, for he was of a wandering disposition, was a substantial structure of stone, situated in a respectable part of the city, and, indeed, in sight of the royal harem. The house had been built by his grandfather, who was a moderately prosperous merchant of the city, his employment being to gather the produce of the surrounding country and to sell it either in the city of Tophel or to caravans trading with foreign countries. The house had been beautified in its structure by an artistic mingling of basalt and the durable limestone of the country: but now, through a long process of

weathering, the characteristic colours of the stones had given place to a mossy grey.

On the death of the merchant, the residence had fallen into the possession of his son Nurah, who was the father of Kur. Without the ability for business which his father possessed, Nurah's nature was more in keeping with the wilder aspect of the surrounding country. He loved to be alone in the forest or in the rocky wilds toward the north. A means of livelihood which proved agreeable to his disposition was found in the chase. He was a good bowman and so skilled a hunter that he was not only able to maintain his family in good condition, but also to add something to their wealth. It was a dangerous pursuit, however, and, while hardly yet in middle life, Nurah's recklessness brought him to a violent death. He set out to spend a few days in the rocky region near the salt sea in search of honey.

After a week had passed, the household was so thoroughly alarmed that Kur, then a boy of fifteen, with some attendants hired for the occasion, set out in search of his father. What they found was a bare skeleton with some of the bones broken or disconnected and some of the smaller bones lying

at a distance, as if carried thither by wild beasts. The garments which had been roughly torn away, the bow and quiver and general equipment Kur recognized to be those of his father. The fears with which he set out had been realized.

Kur was unnerved and dizzy from the shock of discovery, but his attendants looked around more calmly. The skeleton lay at the foot of a bank of rock which rose almost vertically for about twenty feet. On the more oblique slope above, they heard the hum of bees and noticed a nest partly dilapidated. It told the story of the disaster. Nurah had climbed to the nest and, while despoiling it of its delicious treasure, was severely stung and staggered over the cliff. As he lay either dead or helpless from his fall, the beasts by night and the birds by day stripped off the flesh, and left the skeleton bare to bleach in the sun.

The subsequent life of Kur was that of an adventurer and a traveller. In his boyhood he had accompanied his father on many of his hunting trips and his reckless nature acquired a love of adventure. He travelled with caravans into many lands. He had been several times at Damascus. He

had visited Ninevah and Samaria and had even spent a year in Egypt. It sometimes happened that a band of desperadoes from Edom would swoop down on a village of Judea or of Moab. In several of the boldest of these raids Kur had been the most daring and vigorous of all the wild gang. In the raid upon the border villages of Jude which immediately preceded the late war, Kur had taken a good deal of valuable spoil which he stored in his house at Tophel. During this expedition, he saw a little of the wealth which was in the land of Judea and his greed was greatly augmented thereby. He at once joined himself to the army, which his king was preparing to lead into that land.

For several reasons the Edomites hated the Judeans. The overbearing pride and arrogance of the latter people toward their neighbours of another kingdom, and of which they were not modest about making a display, the air of superiority or even of loathing which made itself prominent in all their dealings with foreigners could have no other effect than to gender hatred among the peoples of a neighbouring kingdom. A wealthy nation like Phœnicia was treated

with more respect. But Edom was only Edom. The people were neither wealthy nor cultured. Moreover, the Edomites were enemies of Judea from time immemorial, and so they were regarded as little better than swine. On the other hand, the Edomites hated the people of Judea so heartily that they were ready to fight, to pilfer, to plunder, or to murder in the land of Judea whenever they dared to cross the border.

The result of the war has already been briefly described. The host of Amaziah defeated the army of Edom, with great slaughter, on the border of the Arabah, captured some border stations, overran a large part of the country, and encamped before Tophel. But the king of Edom made terms of peace through the sacrifice of the independence of his realm, and the host of Judea returned to Jerusalem.

When a party of fellow-adventurers, whom Kur had accompanied on several previous occasions, made secret preparations to try their fortune again in the land of Judea, Kur had other work on his hands, which detained him for a time in his own land: but it was arranged that he should join them at a later time. He did not find them as near

to Jerusalem as had been expected, but was able to trace their retreat toward the south and joined the remnant of the party near Bethlehem. How the ill-fated expedition came to its end is well known to the reader. Kur was the only survivor of the party; and, at the place where our former narrative broke off, he was lying at the fold of Ben-Or under the care of Amos and Enoch-Benarad, who were even at that time beginning to ply him with questions, with a view to securing the coveted information which he was able to give concerning the people of Edom and their land.

In the course of the robber's story, as he spoke of the part he had taken in the raid which was made upon the Judean border at the time of Ruth's disappearance, Enoch-Benarad's heart began to beat quicker and he listened, trembling with eagerness to hear some allusion to that all-important subject. Amos, too, listened with closer attention as the Edomite dwelt upon the events of that critical day and night. Kur would have passed over that adventure with the same brevity and rapidity with which he disposed of other similar adventures. But Amos asked him to relate it with a little more detailed

account. When the story was all told, it was only a brutal raid of foreign plunderers, such as occasionally occurred among the semi-barbarous people of those days. Several girls had been carried off to Edom, but Kur had given his attention to securing as much valuable spoil as he could, without troubling the wives and daughters of the inhabitants into whose midst he had so roughly intruded himself.

"Was your party divided?" asked Amos.

"No," replied the robber. "We went in a body, all together, and returned together."

"How far did you travel into Judea?"²

"We made a short circle along the border and took in four villages."

"How far north did you come?"

"Not so far as Hazor, which we did not venture to attack."

"You say that the party remained together during the whole raid. Are you sure that no one strayed away from it?"

"We were all together when we went out. I know that two men were killed. The rest came back together until we came into Edom. Then, of course, we separated to our homes, but it was morning and the sun was nearly up when we parted company."

"That is strange," said Amos to Enoch-Benarad, when they were together outside of the fold. "It could not have been that party of Edomites which carried off Ruth. They hardly came within a day's journey of Tekoa. Now I bethink myself, her disappearance was before nightfall. The men who seized her must have come up on the night previous to the night of the raid. They remained in hiding in the wilderness during the early part of the day; then ventured out and seized my sister as she was passing to the fold. It was before night-fall; and on that same night the raid was made on the South Country border. It seems strange too, that they could seize a girl and carry her off in broad daylight without being seen. There are no trees to conceal them, and in the way which she took there are no rocks. How could it happen without being seen from Tekoa?"

"It is all a mystery," replied the bereaver lover. "How do we know that she was carried into Edom? I believe that Kur tells the truth; and, if so, it was not his party of plunderers which carried her off. I am all bewildered. The more we learn the greater the puzzle seems. But, as you have so often

said, we must not despair, for to me despair would mean death."

"No, we must not despair," said Amos. "Do you remember the sacrifice at Jerusalem and the prayer of Ahiah, when Jehovah seemed to speak to our souls words of peace and hope? I find myself believing and hoping for success so naturally that even these great discouragements, which come up before us, cannot make me feel wholly disheartened. I have spoken to you and to my brother Boz of some of the experiences which I have had of late. Do you think, as Boz seems to, that they are mere delusions. I feel sure that it is the voice of Jehovah."

"It may be," returned Enoch-Benarad, "that it is a true inspiration. But the thought does not seem to bring much comfort to me. I wish I could have the same hopeful feeling. But I must be doing something, trying in some way to find her. If I remain idle and allow my own thoughts to rend my soul asunder, I must die."

"I know," said Amos, "that the trouble is weighing only too heavily upon you. We do not know, it is true, to what fate the poor girl may have been compelled. But we have talked of that before, and we both of

us know that where the heart is pure in itself, no compulsion can taint it. I feel that I can trust my sister to the care of Jehovah and that all will come right in the end."

"What are we to do next?" asked Enoch-Benarad.

"Carry out our plans. I see nothing else."

"How long will it be before you can leave the flock?"

"I think that, by the time the Edomite is recovered I will be able to go. In the meantime, we must learn some more from him. You ply him with questions to-morrow while I am away with the sheep. He has not said a word about the search which the Edomites profess to have made for Ruth. He may have overlooked it, or, perhaps, he does not care to refer to it. If all Edom was searched, he must know something about the search that was made. Speak to him about her to-morrow and find out, if you can, just how thorough the search was."

On the following day, Enoch-Benarad thought that he noticed a puzzled expression on the face of the Edomite, and as he spoke to him from time to time there seemed to be a questioning look in his eyes. The fact

was that the robber had never ceased to wonder at the unlooked-for kindness which had been shown him; and the eagerness and minuteness with which the young men plied him with questions concerning his native land re-awakened his suspicions that there must be some secret purpose at the bottom of all their kindness. Could it be that they were agents of the crown, who had been set over him to draw from him information concerning his native land? Was king Amaziah planning another invasion of Edom and was this only an easy way of spying out the country? But the soldiers, when they found that he was an Edomite, had dropped him and left him in the wilderness. Then the thought flashed into his mind that even the desertion by the soldiers was only a trick to turn aside his suspicion. It seemed all clear now. The soldiers had known from the first that he was from Edom,—that the whole gang of robbers were Edomites. The plot had been well arranged from the beginning, and these two young men, who were so gentle and womanlike in their care, were really acting their part as secret spies to gather information concerning the land of Edom. Would he be allowed to go to his

home after he should recover from his injuries? It seemed more probable, since he was still under the charge of the government, that he would be held as a prisoner, and that, after nothing more of value could be learned from him, he would probably be put to death.

Such thoughts, awakened within the man and filling his mind, could not but produce a corresponding change in his countenance. When Enoch-Benarad approached and addressed him with a purpose to continue his questioning, he noticed that a change had come over the Edomite. He would not speak with his former frankness, and it seemed that he avoided or evaded, so far as he could, any direct question. Enoch-Benarad was a little surprised at this change, but, supposing that it was only a passing mood, decided to wait a little before broaching the important subject upon which he purposed to make enquiries.

Left to himself, Kur bethought himself that he had allowed his face and attitude to express too much of his thoughts. What might happen if his inquisitors, the supposed agents of the king, should learn that he suspected their purpose? Might they not

put him to torture in order to extract more information from him, or, if he refused to answer, dispose of him by an immediate death? If he should answer the questions, would he not betray his country, and, perhaps even then, be held a prisoner or be executed on his recovery? If, on the other hand, he should refuse to answer and thus prove himself of no more service to the Judean king, it seemed probable that he would be dispatched at once and, perhaps, be tortured to death. What was he to do? If he turned to the right hand or to the left he would, as he thought, be running into almost certain death or would prove a traitor to his country. But could he not find a middle course by which, through artifice and skill, he might escape? He would try it. The questions might be answered in such a way as to give no valuable, or, perhaps, no true information respecting Edom. He might be able to deceive the young men as to the true extent to which his own recovery was advanced. If, after he was really able to make his escape, his guards could be induced to leave him, supposing him yet too weak to move, it would be a crowning success to his schemes. He resolved to remain perfect-

ly still while his guards were with him but, during their absence, to exercise the moveable parts of his body, in order to gain strength unknown to them. But another cause for apprehension was the occasional visit of the medical man. He could not so easily be deceived.

At a later time, when Enoch-Benarad took his seat by the couch, he found his patient as ready to talk and, seemingly, in as frank a humour as he had ever been.

"I feel better now," said the latter. "I was suffering when you spoke to me before. The pain has stopped somewhat, and I am resting better."

"I knew by your face that you were not feeling as well as usual," returned the nurse. "But I see that you are feeling better now. Do you feel in a mood to talk?"

"I think so if you wish it."

"I was very much interested in the story which you told us about yourself, especially when you touched upon the late war. If you care to speak of that again I will be pleased to hear."

"Ah," thought the robber. "Now he is getting to work again. From this on, I must be careful what I say. I will watch

the questions closely and be cautious." Then he said aloud "I may have left out a good many things in my story. I feel dull now and cannot remember just what I told and what I left unsaid. If there is anything in particular, which you wish to ask about, I will be glad to speak of it."

"When you were speaking of the raid which you made upon the borders of Judea, you mentioned that several women were carried into Edom. Do you know where they were taken and what has become of them?"

"There," thought Kur. "He is on the same old stump which king Amaziah was hacking at. That abominable king must be trying to pick a quarrel. That girl story must be made up to trap us into another war. They have made a big fuss about it, but nobody knows anything about her. Well, it will do no harm to tell the truth about this matter, and it will do no good to tell what is untrue."

After a pause during which these thoughts passed through his mind, Kur spoke to his nurse and inquisitor. "The women were all sent back to their homes, as your king demanded. The raiders boasted of their captures so loudly that the officers

knew who had the women. After the war, they were all compelled to give up their captives, who were then taken with a military escort to their homes. It may be that one or two of the girls were a little unnerved and hysterical from the scare, but what was done could not be helped."

Enoch-Benarad winced a little at this last remark of the robber. But the latter, ignorant of what was passing in the young man's mind, did not notice that his nerves partly collapsed for a moment, and that he drooped a little as he sat by the couch. Kur paused a moment for breath and then continued speaking. "There was a big fuss made about another girl whom the Edomites were charged with carrying off."

Enoch-Benarad rose from his stool and stood over the bed and bent forward to catch every word. The robber noticed his eagerness now,—that his hand on the pillow was trembling and that his whole aspect showed great excitement.

"Here is something new," thought the robber. "What can be the matter with the boy? Is he so anxious to serve his king? What was I saying which affected him in that way? Oh! I remember. I was speaking

of that girl about whom such a time has been made. What can it all mean?"

"Go on, go on," begged Enoch-Benarad. "Tell me what you know about that affair."

"Well, I know nothing about her at all," said Kur. "I only know that, after the war, a great stir was made about a girl, of whom nobody seemed to have ever seen or heard. After the war, our kings agreed that the captives taken by both sides should be returned. But, after all was done as agreed, a message came from the king of Judea saying that a certain girl, Ruth of Tekoa, who had been carried off by Edomites, was not returned. The message threatened the king of Edom with another war if she should not be found, while, at the same time, it offered a hundred shekels of gold for her return. The king of Edom was anxious to avoid another war, and so he ordered that a search be made for the girl, and offered the hundred shekles to the man who should find her. All who had been out on the raid were examined by the king himself. My house and the houses of the others were searched by the king's officers. But nobody knew anything about the girl. No

trace could be found anywhere. Then the king had it published over the whole kingdom that a hundred shekels were offered for her recovery. I suppose several hundred men went on the search. I saw there was but little chance, but I joined them. I knew the country as well as most people, and knew especially where to find the dens of the border robbers. A wound, which I had received in the war, was not wholly healed, but I set out. That is what kept me from accompanying the plunderers who came over to Jerusalem. I hung to the search until there was no more hope, and then I joined my party in the wilderness east of Bethlehem."

"Is there no place in Edom where a girl might be hidden away," asked Enoch-Benarad.

"No," said Kur. "She is not in the kingdom. The Edomites are sure of that. They think that she must have been taken to some other place. Perhaps into the land of Ammon, or even to Jerusalem. There is more chance for her to be confined in Jerusalem than in the land of Edom. There are rich men in Jerusalem, who would hardly give her up for a hundred shekels."

"That could not be," said Enoch-Benarad.

"When Jerusalem has been searched as closely as Edom has, you will know more surely," remarked the robber.

"But my father knows nearly all the rich men in Jerusalem. They would not steal a girl from us," said the youth.

"Your father," cried the Edomite in astonishment. "Is she his daughter? Are you her brother?"

"No. I am not her brother. We are friends of her family," said Enoch-Benarad; and, so saying, he arose and went hastily out of the fold, and left his patient to meditate upon the surprise which he had received.

On that night, when Amos was leading in his flock, Enoch-Benarad met him half-way and, during the walk to the fold, recounted to him the conversation which he had with the Edomite. The opinion had hitherto prevailed that the girl must have been taken into Edom, and, despite the official protest which came from Tophel, the families and friends of Ben-Or and of Arad the merchant, had felt justified in their opinion that she was hidden somewhere within the bounds of that kingdom. This new ac-

count, however, which the robber gave, coming as it did from an unofficial and disinterested party, bore upon it every appearance of veracity, and satisfied the opinions of the two young men that the search, which had been made throughout the land of Edom, was just as thorough as had been reported by the king of that land.

But still the opinion of Amos was not shaken that his sister had been carried off to Edom. There was the possibility that she had been sold to a caravan or into some foreign country; and that would account for the fact of her not being found in Edom. If the purpose of the kidnapper had been to make profit from his capture, it was not unlikely that he would ride away to the south to the great caravan road, which passed from the Persian Gulf to the land of the Philistines and to Egypt. There, it was not improbable that he would soon find an opportunity to sell his beautiful captive for a large sum of money. This idea had been suggested some time before by Arad the merchant, and the possibility that Ruth was so disposed of had been talked over many times both in the house of Ben-Or and by the two young men in the field. Arad the

merchant had, in his younger days, travelled a great deal with caravans, and he could recount a number of transactions, in the course of long journeys, where slaves were bought by the wayside, and one or two instances were very similar to what the present might be. Ben-Or's experience in the mercantile line had been small, but he took his roll of manuscript and read the story of Joseph sold into Egypt. At first, the suggestion seemed very probable to the young men, and, for a time, they even contemplated making their journey into Philistia and Egypt instead of into Edom. But, on cooler thought, they came to the decision that Edom must be the starting point of their search.

Now the invalid robber made a suggestion, which had never before occurred either to Amos or to his friends. Perhaps the captured girl had been carried off in some other direction,—perhaps into the land of Ammon or even to Jerusalem. Amos was inclined to laugh at the idea that she might have been carried into Jerusalem, kidnapped by her own fellow-tribesmen. There was a certain generous bigotry among the people of the country, and appearing quite prominently in the inexperienced young, which hesitated to

believe evil of another member of the same tribe, or, at least, which naturally transferred the blame for all mischief upon foreigners.

Amos thought of the chances which the kidnappers would have to escape into the land of Ammon. They would have to pass very near to Jerusalem, but, on the whole, the way was easier and equally as safe as the ride to the border of Edom.

"Well," said he, "it seems to make little difference which way we turn. If we set out in one way, it is equally as probable that she was carried in the opposite direction. The horses' tracks were found on the sandy patch yonder, and again over in this direction,"—pointing toward the east. "But they were muffled and followed each other so closely that we could not tell clearly which way they went. We supposed toward the south, but now, I think we might possibly have been mistaken. It may be that my sister was taken into the land of Ammon; and, if so, there is the further chance that she might have been sold on the Damascus road, to a caravan which would carry her away into Syria. The world is large. Which way shall we turn? A drop of rain falls on the

Jordan. Can we find it again in the Salt Sea? Our Ruth has been lost in the wide, wide world, and has left no footmarks, by which we might follow. If we turn to the right hand we meet a perplexity. If we turn to the left hand, we find a tangle which cannot be unravelled. Before us all is dark and behind us there is no light. I feel discouraged and cast down. But no, my friend! Let us not be overwhelmed, for we have the light of promise. I know that Jehovah will help us. I feel his presence even now, and my doubts and fears of a moment ago have vanished."

His companion did not hear the last part of this speech; for his thoughts were occupied with another matter. He scarcely knew when Amos stopped speaking. They walked in silence for a few moments, and then Enoch-Benarad said: "Our robber patient was startled when I told him that I was a friend of Ruth. He asked me if I was her brother; and tried to get up in bed so that I heard him groan with pain as I was going out. I wonder what startled him so."

"Do you suppose," said Amos, "that he

knows more about the affair than he chooses to tell?"

"For some reason," returned the other, he seems greatly interested since I told him that. I went in to see him shortly afterwards and he seemed as if he would like to ask some questions: but it occurred to me that I ought to speak to you before telling him any more."

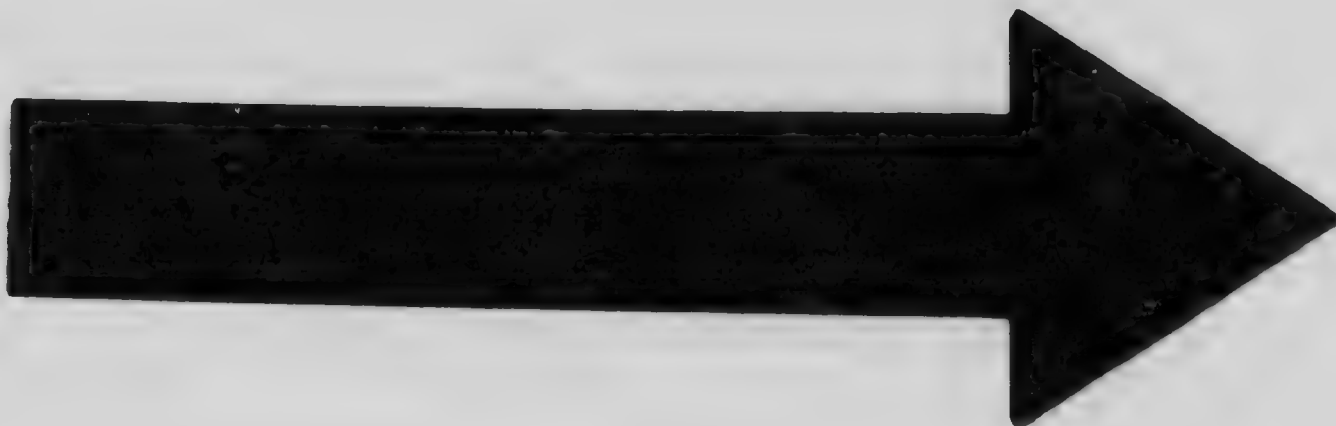
"We will have a talk with him to-night," said Amos. "It may be that, if we explain the circumstances to him fully, he will help us. I thought a few days ago that he seemed to have a little suspicion of our motives. But there comes Boz. I will go and meet him while the sheep drink."

The understanding was that Amos must remain with the flock until the beginning of the autumn rains. After the beginning of the rainy season, there would be no more necessity to divide the flock, for pasture would be ample for the sustenance of all, even in near proximity to the fold.

After it had been explained to Kur what was the real relation between the two young men and the girl who had disappeared, after it became clear to him what was the real cause and purpose of their questionings, his

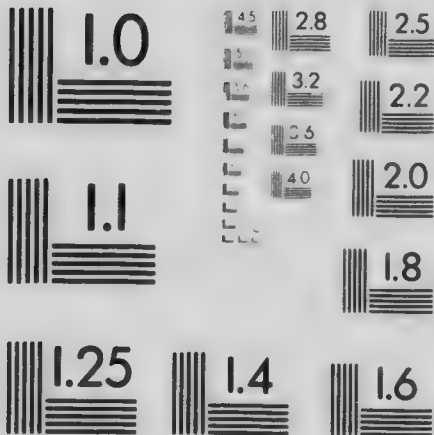
suspicious gradually left him, and he would join in conversation heartily, and volunteer both information and advice. By the time when he was so far recovered as to be able to limp away to his home, he had developed a strong attachment to his young friends; and, in gratitude for the kindness shown him, was ready to do anything in his power whereby he might be able to assist his youthful benefactors.





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CHAPTER V.

FROM TEKOA TO TOPHEL.

THE sycamore figs, which ripen almost the year round, are few and small at this season. If one should walk through the orchard of Ben-Or, he would notice that careful work has been done to gather the last remnant of the season's fruit. The fruit-bin in the storehouse is empty and a number of baskets of selected fruit, the last of the season, are ready to be carried to the market. Another apartment in the storehouse, where the wool is kept, has also given up a large part of its contents.

Out of doors, a warm rain is falling quietly and softly, and its patter upon the roof of the storehouse and the tiny splashing of the falling drops in miniature puddles, which occupy every indenture of the ground, are refreshing to the ear after the long season of drought. Nature is already beginning to look brighter, and men and women, and boys and girls, moved by the same impulse

of quickening life, are fresher, handsomer livelier and merrier than before. As little Jakorath trips home from the village, where she has been doing some errands for her mother, she laughs as her uplifted face is bathed by the warm drops of falling rain, and her bare feet brush the moisture from the short grass. Gripping the bundle, which she is carrying, under one arm, she stretches her other hand palm-upward to catch the falling rain; then with a skip and a merry laugh and using her one free arm as a wing in imitation of the birds, she darts to the door of the cottage, flings it open and enters like a whirlwind, and the door shuts behind her.

What is going on within the cottage? There has been the continuous buzz, hum clatter of spinning and weaving. How many people might be at work? Have we not learned that there is only one woman in the household? Yes, but we have also learned that the venerable Ben-Or was accustomed to assist his daughter-in-law at her work. The boy Ramah has also learned to spin. But three heads and six hands will hardly make all that noise. In truth, three women have been hired from the village. The door op-

ens. Ah! they have been working in cramped quarters, and two women are carrying their implements to the storehouse where they will have more space and air for the exercise of their skill and industry. A cart drives up to the cottage with one ox attached to it. It is Amos returning from Gedor, where he has been buying linen thread. In some of the cloths which were preparing for the market, a thread of linen was interwoven with fine wool to give it greater stability and to produce a variety in colour.

On the previous day, Amos had made a journey to Jerusalem with a load of sheep for the market. It was purposed that in a few days more he should make the trip again and carry a load of cloth and woollen thread, and a few baskets of figs. In making such mercantile visits to Jerusalem, it was his custom to reserve the finest specimen of the produce to be offered at the Temple. On the previous day, a fine lamb had been sacrificed, and now, a garment of the best cloth was being prepared, to be offered at his next visit to the city.

At length, when the long day's toil was done, the buzz, hum, and rattle of the busy

workers ceased, and the hired help retired to their homes in the village.

On that night there was a banquet spread at the residence of Arad the merchant, and a number of friends were invited, especially the friends of Enoch-Benarad, and those who were interested in the dangerous journey which he was shortly to make. Ben-Or and his son Amos arrayed themselves in linen garments, decorated according to the usual custom of the day, and repaired to the banquet.

As the guests arrived they were given a hearty welcome, and, when they were all come in, they were arranged in order around the tables, of which there were two. The men of the party were arranged around a large table occupying the middle of the room, or near the middle, while the women were shown to a small table set against the wall. There is little similarity between the tables used at that time and those with which moderns are familiar. The tables, around which the guests of Arad assembled, were like low platforms, their height from the floor being about a span. Instead of chairs, cushioned couches, or rather cushioned carpets, were arranged around the table,

upon which the guests would sit in oriental fashion. The tables were spread with the richest viands which the country could furnish. The room was brilliantly lighted and was decorated with many curious and costly ornaments, some of which were trophies of the merchant's own wanderings. Here and there upon the walls were inscriptions in Phœnician characters. Three walls were also decorated by carved pictures of battle scenes; while upon the fourth wall, written in letters of gold and occupying almost the entire surface, was that beautiful poem, the finest gem of song which came from David's pen, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

As the guests were arranged around the table, Ben-Or, somewhat to his own surprise, was given the place of honor nearest to the master of the house, and the other guests were assigned places according to age or degree. Amos and Enoch-Benarad sat opposite each other at equal distances from the head of the table. The seat, or rather, couch, where Amos sat gave him a view of the other table where the ladies of the party were making merry in their own way. It was amusing to see the restlessness of Dinah, the little daughter of Arnan. Not once nor

twice but many times her face turned impulsively away from the table and her eyes, as if drawn by a magnet, sought Enoch-Benarad. Why do some of the ladies show such deep sympathy for the little girl, while others appear not to notice anything unusual until she turns away from them, but then put on an amused smile? Dinah's secret cannot be hidden. It has long ago been the talk of the village. In the days that were long gone by, before Enoch-Benarad's attachment for Ruth had taken its final form, Arad, the wealthy merchant of Tekoa, had been thinking with himself and talking with his better half about the important problem of finding a suitable wife for their son. It was natural that the daughter of their wealthy neighbour should attract their attention. Arnan, the wealthy shepherd, lord of flocks and herds, was also becoming unusually friendly to the family of Arad. The match was desirable to the parents of both, and both children were encouraged. But fate, a perverse fate as the parents thought, intervened to prevent the match. The decrees of Providence do not always follow along the ways delineated by human wisdom. The girl, though only a child, had

acted upon the impulse of her parents' encouragement and had allowed her thoughts to dwell upon the boy until the passion for him ruled her life. The blow of disappointment had crushed her for a time, but she recovered somewhat as other young people do under similar circumstances. But after Ruth had disappeared, her passion began to revive. The parents of Enoch-Benarad, too, were still anxious for the union, and, but for the barrier of the young man's determination, would have brought it about.

Amos knew nothing of the suffering which a disappointment of that nature brings, and he felt amused, at first, and then sad and ashamed as he perceived how selfish the feeling was.

The conversation of the evening ran upon various subjects. Rumors of wars in the east, the growing jealousy between Judea and Israel, the prosperity of the country, little incidents of gossip in Tekoa, and especially the purposed adventurous journey of Enoch-Benarad and Amos, furnished topics for interesting conversation. The general opinion was that the young men were taking a rash and hopeless step, and some efforts were made even at that late date to dissuade

them from it. Arnan the shepherd was especially vehement in his protest against so foolish an adventure. But when the party broke up, the young men were as firm as ever in their resolve, and the friends one and all, united in wishing them success.

There was a high place of worship in Tekoa, as, indeed, there was in every village of importance, where weekly prayer was made. But the chief centres of worship in the southern kingdom were at Jerusalem and Bethsheba. The local sanctuary at Tekoa was very simple in its arrangement. The grove under which some of their forefathers had worshipped had been cut away; but the altar of sacrifice constructed of rough stone, which had stood from time immemorial, was still standing; and, behind it, where the grove had been, there was a building to shelter the worshippers. The roof of this building was of wood, but the sides were of leather stretched over a light frame. Under this shelter, half house and half tent, during the week a couple of poor Levites gave instructions to the children of Tekoa. On a Sabbath when a large congregation was assembled, the leather sides were raised to

serve as a projection of the roof, and thus the building, though now open at the sides, was made to shelter a large number of people.

It was the Sabbath before the beginning of the journey into Edom. The peace-offering had been made; and the people were now assembled under shelter of the roof, which was extended to its full size. The venerable elder of Tekoa stood on a flat stone, which served as a platform, in the midst, and with the congregation standing around him on all sides. The prayers had ascended with the odour of the incense; and, in their flight had carried to the throne of God the subject of sorrow which had been weighing upon the family of Ben-Or. The elder was now addressing the people on the duties of worship and of faith and of prayer. He drew illustrations from the Patriarchs, from Moses, and the prophets. He dwelt upon the terrible anger of Jehovah against the transgressor; and, as he pointed to examples from among the Egyptians, the Philistines, and even from among wicked kings, and wicked men of their own nation, examples of sin and rebellion and unbelief which called down the vengeance of the Al-

mighty, the congregation trembled before him and Enoch-Benarad hung his head and crept back toward the rear of the assembly. Then the tenor of the address changed, and the wisdom of Jehovah, and his gracious goodness and lovingkindness were dwelt upon until the audience melted into tears. The people of that land and of that day were more emotional than we of modern times, and they changed more readily from one emotional extreme to another. Thus it was that the speaker swayed his audience; and, when the address came to an end, it seemed that Jehovah had descended into their very midst, and Enoch-Benarad and Ben-Or and even Arad the merchant were led to feel that Jehovah was guiding in the undertaking which was about to be begun. The service ended with a solemn chant of the song of Moses: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations."

We pass over the scene of farewell and parting, and say very little about the journey to Edom. One incident must, however, be described because it has a bearing on the sequent narrative.

Before Kur, the Edomite, limped off toward his home, he had given a good deal of

valuable instruction concerning the land of Edom. His advice to Amos and his friend was that they assume names and represent themselves as travellers from the northern kingdom of Israel. There was so much bitter feeling between Edom and Judea that it would be hardly safe for a couple of Judeans to attempt to pass through the land of Edom without a strongly armed escort. On the other hand, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Edom were on friendly terms: and, if the young travellers were thought to come from the northern kingdom, they could move about with comparative safety, and their only danger would be from regular highway robbers. Following this advice, they would cross the Jordan and journey southward along the east of the Salt Sea.

Another piece of advice, which the Edomite had volunteered, was that they should not keep to the main highway. On the highlands east of the Salt Sea and the Jordan there was a road passing through Edom, Moab, Ammon, Bashan, and Syria to Damascus. The usual course for travellers from Judea or Israel to pursue was to cross the Jordan and gain the highway and to follow

it southward through Ammon and Moab to Tophel. Kur had travelled in those countries a good deal, and the voice of his experience was that two travellers on the highway would surely fall victims to some one of the robber gangs, which watch along that road, somewhere in the land of Ammon or Moab. He advised them not to follow the road, but to make their way through the wild country between the highway and the Salt Sea. He further suggested that, if they should go in the guise of hunters, they would be less likely to be molested.

This advice of the Edomite was seconded by the opinion of Arad the merchant, who had travelled extensively in his lifetime, and who also had the remembrance of certain experiences with highway robbers. The two young travellers could not choose but to follow the course suggested by experience and wisdom. They, however decided to retain their own names.

The two travellers had compassed a large part of their journey through the land of Moab. They were approaching a low ridge of rock. Where there was a break which allowed them to see through the ridge,

there seemed to be immediately beyond it one of those deep narrow valleys such as are frequent in that country.

"Hark," said Enoch-Benarad in a low tone. "There is a dinner for us."

It was the voice of birds, but not with musical throats. A certain species of waterfowl, which at that time abounded around the shores of Chinnereth and along the Jordan valley, and which furnished a dainty morsel of food, was evidently producing the sounds which had caught the ear of Enoch-Benarad. Each of the young men instinctively drew an arrow from the quiver and placed it upon the bowstring.

"Now we will move slowly and quietly," said Amos. "You see those rocks on the top of the ridge. We will come up behind them and so be within easy bowshot of the birds. Then we will select our birds and both shoot at once. Let us keep our heads down."

"I wonder how the birds happen to be here?" asked Enoch-Benarad. "They do not often follow up the valleys on our side of the Sea."

"Oh," replied Amos, "they have wandered down the Jordan, and, finding the

water of the Salt Sea little to their taste, have followed up this brook. Hear the water running! It must be a brook of some size."

They stopped speaking as they drew nearer to the ridge. Then, coming up behind the rocks, they peered through and saw the birds, which they were seeking, below them along the edges of the brook. Each drew several arrows from his quiver and placed them in readiness. Then, in a whispered conversation, it was decided which bird each should try his skill upon first. The arrows are on the strings, and the bows are being raised into position for a shot: but what is that? Something flashed in the sunlight. One bird raised its wings as if to fly; then dropped them again, lay over in the brook, and its head sank beneath the water. An arrow, which had done the execution, lay with its head buried in the bird's side.

"Where did it come from," whispered Enoch-Benarad. As he was speaking, there was a whish, flash, splash, and a second arrow missed. But a third arrow, which followed right upon the second, brought down

another bird, shot on the wing as the flock was beginning its flight.

"They are behind that rock," said Amos, pointing across the gulch. "We will see them when they come out." The two young men crouched lower behind the rocks and peered across.

Just then a lad of about sixteen years clambered over the rock on the opposite side of the gulch, and climbed down to the brook. Then another head rose above the rock. It was the head of a man: and, as his face came in sight, the sunlight showed a big red scar on his cheek.

The two young men looked at each other for a moment in speechless surprise. It was their old patient, Kur, the Edomite robber. Enoch-Benarad sprang onto the rock before him and shouted out "Ho, friend Kur." The Edomite started and grasped his bow, but a glance at the opposite ridge told him who the intruders were. Then the momentary expression of surprise and alarm gave place to one of real joy, as he called out his greeting across the narrow gulch which separated them.

On the day which followed this incident, an idle crowd was assembled, or rath-

er, lounging about in the market place of Tophel, listening to the harangue of a would-be prophet of the national deity. Some were standing in groups, and making a few passing remarks as they listened to the oration. An occasional solitary individual was walking here and there over the grounds, passing from one group to another, or merely walking to stretch his limbs after sitting or lying for a long time. Some were sitting down or lying upon the ground, for the grass was dry and warm. Although the wet season had well set in, yet there had been no rain for a day or two and the sun had dried the surface of everything exposed to its rays. There were people of both sexes and of all degrees and social ranks, from the beggar in rags to the indolent sons of wealthy citizens, who were seeking to catch what pleasure they could from the passing hour. The discourse could not have been one of the highest eloquence, for many people were giving their attention to other things, occupied in separate conversation, or inspecting certain articles which were being offered for sale. Purchasers of fruit and other palatable delicacies were being made from time to time, and a number of speci-

mens were fast disappearing from the hands of the purchasers on different parts of the grounds.

The prophet concluded his discourse and stepped down from the orator's block. Another took his place and began to expatiate upon the divine mysteries which had been entrusted to him. Just at this time three new comers appeared on the scene. One was a youth of about sixteen and the others were, perhaps, six or eight years older. They brought into the market-place a burden of fowls and small game, which the younger of the three immediately offered for sale. The other two, who appeared to be strangers in the city, looked around curiously over the crowd and then gave their attention to the speaker.

Two boys, who were lounging a little distance away, now came up and spoke to the youth as he was offering his spoil for sale. "Well, Nurah," said one. "I see your father has been more fortunate in the woods than he was about Jerusalem. Where did you find the birds? We do not have many of that kind around here?"

"We shot them along the gulch," said Nurah, "just beyond the border of Edom.

We followed the flock up and got three chances to shoot at them."

"Where is your father?" asked the other lad, who had not spoken. "Has he gone over to try his luck around Jerusalem again? The God of the land was against him before. I am afraid that, if he tries it again, he will be killed outright as my poor father was."

"No," returned Nurah, "my father has given up such a wild pursuit. The mark on his face makes him too conspicuous for border work. He will do as his father did—follow the chase, and gather gums and honey and herbs from the woods. I am glad of the change, because he will allow me to go with him now. You see, we have made a good beginning. Now, my father has gone into the woods of Moab to gather gums and honey and dye stuff."

While this conversation was going on and continuing at much greater length, Amos and Enoch-Benarad,—for they were the two strangers who came to the market-place with Nurah, the son of Kur,—were listening to the words of the prophet of the Edomite God. The worship, as he described it, bore many marks of resemblance to the Baal wor-

ship, which the children of Israel had learned from their Canaanite predecessors in the land of Palestine. He was now dwelling on the ancient rite of worship by means of fire, and he continued thus:—

“O, ye children of Edom, the mysteries which my breast contains concerning things divine are beyond what has ever been revealed to mortal man. With how just pride I boast myself to be the recipient of unspeakable secrets, beyond the ken of human thought. A vision I have recently experienced I will now make known to you. It concerns the destinies of men and of nations. Children of Edom, turn your eyes toward heaven. My eyes were opened and I saw the king, the great God of the heavens, Father of all things that live upon the earth. He it is who sends the rain. He it is who commands the sunshine. He sets his lamp in the heavens to illuminate the earth, the sun by day and the moon by night. He directs the south-wind and it scorches our land. He commands the gentle breezes from the west and they fan our cheeks and play among the tresses of our hair. He it is who rides upon the whirlwind, as it breaks in fury upon the face of the earth, as it up-

roots the mighty oak, shatters the houses of stone and rends the very hills asunder. How wonderful is the great God who dwells in the heavens above.

Listen then O children of Edom, to the vision. My eyes were opened and I had a vision, a vision of the great God of the heavens. He was riding on a purple cloud: his chariot and his horses were of flaming fire. The wheels of his chariot were like fire, and the track which they left behind them burned like living coals among the clouds. He rode across the heavens from the East to the West, and disappeared beyond the last extremity of earth. Then he rode back. The doors of the firmament opened to let him pass through. He scaled the clouds until he reached the sun; and there, as once more the doors of heaven opened to let him pass, the chariot dashed into the invisible beyond, leaving nothing but its fiery tracks amongst the clouds.

Children of Edom, again I say bare your heads and lift your eyes in solemn wonderment to heaven. Learn the lesson which the vision teaches. When the great God, who dwells in palaces which mortals may not see, above the azure firmament,

which canopies the earth, majestically revealed himself to my prophetic sight, what was his appearance? Involved in fire, drawn by fire, leaving fiery tracks behind! What a sacred word is this:—fire! We place the victim slain upon the burning pile, and in the flame the Gods draw near and feast.

You are likewise well aware, people of the mighty God, that, as the father of all dwells beyond the firmament above, so, beneath the ground his Goddess has her home; mother of all things living on the earth. She it is who causes trees to grow, and grass, and herbs, and grain, who gives his food to man, who feeds the beasts and the birds and fish and all things living upon earth.

Know then, ye who hear, that, when the heavens rend and lightning flashes forth, the Father above speaks to the divinity below, his voice the thunder and his tongue a flash of flame. So, likewise, when the earth snakes, the hills are torn apart, and fire leaps forth from earth's interior, sending toward heaven its mighty cloud of smoke, the Goddess in the earth breaks her awful silence and speaks to him above."

By this time the whole assembly were on

their feet and crowding nearer to the speaker. Amos and his two companions remained where they were, for the two Hebrews were loath to mingle with the crowd of foreigners, and Nurah must remain with the game, which he had brought in. The prophet continued his address, as was the custom in that region, in a sort of chant, half oration, half song, but modulating his voice in such a way that the tone and volume corresponded with the thought so naturally as to render his delivery very forceful. Orations, at that time, were usually cast into a poetic form, and in this speech the poetic quality was unusually prominent and yet, there was an irregularity about it, which showed that the words were not premeditated.

The speaker proceeded, and with the same excellence of style and utterance expounded his doctrine to the people. He taught that fire is the one medium by which we communicate with divinity; that wherever a fire burns, both the great God and the great Goddess are together in it; that they sit together in the flame and partake of their sacrificial feast, that, when fire rages through a forest or a city, the great God and the great Goddess are there, either in intense

hunger or in intense wrath, prosecuting their work of destruction. He told a story of the far East, how a fire was kept burning perpetually on the mountain, watched over by a faithful priest, in order to give the great God a continuous means of communicating with the earth. Then with a passionate burst of eloquence he dwelt upon the faithfulness with which the Gods were served in ancient times, when the people, more devoted to the Gods than their own flesh and blood, would sacrifice their eldest born, a burnt offering to feast the deities. "It may have been mistaken zeal," he said, "and that the hunger of the Gods is satisfied with flesh of beasts: but would that men and women now were as eager to render up their service." A reference was then made to the prevailing custom, and a custom which the speaker highly commended, of making the sons to pass through fire, in order that the God and Goddess, who were both present there, might, by their conjunction, communicate a spark of imperishable divinity to the infant boy. The boy was passed through the fire so quickly as to be only slightly burned; but in the passage, as it was suppos-

ed, the God and Goddess united to impart to him a spark of their own substance.

Then followed the concluding part of the address, and a part which a modern writer would much prefer to omit, and which, indeed, in obedience to the demand for decency, can only be described in vague outline. All the productiveness of the earth was believed to be caused by the united efforts of the two great divinities, and the crude notions which the people held as to the manner in which this multiform fertility of the earth was produced by the great God and the great Goddess led to the grossest immorality in their votaries; and the victims of this abominable practice actually believed that in so doing they were usually worshipping their divine Father and their divine Mother. At the high places of worship in Edom, where every allurements was made to entice the people to immorality, there were the so-called sacred tents in which the so-called consecrated women sat waiting for misled men to come and worship with them and to leave an offering in their hands. In closing his address, the prophet even exhorted the people to persevere in this most degrading element of their sacred rites.

The two young Hebrews had heard many stories of the degrading forms of worship practiced by the idolatrous neighbouring peoples, but it had never before been brought before them with so much vividness and with such a sense of reality. Amos shuddered as he thought how awful was the depth to which humanity had sunk in this foreign nation. "How unfortunate it is," said he to his companion, "that a man endowed with such excellent gifts should use them in so abominable a cause. It is a sad truth that the cause of evil never lacks a prophet, but how long it has been since a true prophet of God has arisen in our nation to arouse the people from their sleep, with the thunder of Jehovah. Our venerable friend Ahiah has been praying for it. All good men are longing for it."

An interruption was then caused by the voice of Nurah, who again called out for customers; and, as the attention of the people was now disengaged, several came up and in a little while nearly all the spoil of the field was exchanged for cash. Then he took up what was left—enough for the evening and morning meals—and the three set out for the home of Kur.

The road which they took, even as it left the market place, was very elegant in its pavement and adornments. On the right, was what seemed like a grove of ornamental trees.

"This seems," said Amos to Nurah, "like the grounds of a man who is very rich."

"No," answered the boy. "It is the sacred grove."

They stopped in front of it and looked it over. The trees were carefully trimmed and elegantly trained, affording a cool shade. Thickets of shrubbery grew here and there. In several places a hedge of beautiful flowering shrubbery inclosed a small tent, the lace hangings of which might be seen through the leafage of the hedge. A walk, paved with polished limestone, led from the street through the midst of the grove. Upon Nurah's suggestion, the three walked through this way into the Temple court. To the right and to the left of the court were tents; in the midst of it was the stone altar; and behind it stood the Temple, a beautiful building with elegant external decorations. The Temple with its curtained projections, together with the tents, inclosed

the court on three sides. The fourth side was open and communicated with the street by means of the paved walk, which passed through the midst of the grove, as has already been described.

"What are the tents?" asked Amos as they turned to leave the place.

"Oh, they are the tents of the consecrated women," answered Nurah.

Recollections of the speech which he had just heard came back to Amos, and he shuddered as the thought revived that all this elegant exterior of nature and art was only a garment to conceal a horrible pit of filthiness and vice.

"Do you worship here?" he asked, turning to Nurah and marking the lad's robust health.

"No," replied the boy. "My father has forbid it. He says that the priests and prophets are only shams; that the devoted women are money-grabbing wenches; and that the God and Goddess themselves are not what the prophets say. He says that we can learn more about the Gods in the woods or in the rocky wilderness than here in this den of lies. He used to hate your people, but since he came back this last time he

thinks better of you. He said that the people of Judea have a strange superstition, but it was far better than what the Edomites believe."

The subject of religion was dropped, and as they concluded their journey Enoch-Benarad and Amos asked many questions about the city and about the people of Edom. As they mounted the steps to Nurah's house, Nurah pointed to where the street widened in the distance, and there stood a large house surrounded by a spacious court. "That," said he, "is the royal harem, and the larger house beyond is the palace of the king. The buildings around are mostly occupied by the king's officers and guard. You see part of the guard on duty now.

On entering the house, the first person whom they met, and with whom Nurah made them acquainted, was his sister. She seemed to be of about the same age as her brother; and, as soon as she disappeared through the door to inform the other members of the family that the strangers had arrived, Enoch-Benarad inquired of Nurah if he and his sister were not twins. Nurah explained that they were not twins, but that the girl was two and a half months the younger. Such

a relation will probably seem strange to the reader, as, at first, it did to the two Judeans: but wait a little and see if there are not other monstrosities in this heathen household. They were conducted by Nurah into the living room, where the women sat at their work, and there they made the acquaintance of Kur's better half, which had two heads and four feet, and which occupied two stools on opposite sides of the room: or, in more simple language, which consisted of two women instead of one; for, at the time, it required more than one female to constitute the better half of an able Edomite. Kur, like many of his time and nation, was a bigamist.

It had been insisted on by Kur that the two Judeans should remain at his house so long as they chose to tarry in Tophel. Rumor soon spread around that two young hunters from the children of Israel were sojourning in the city, and that they were making inquiries concerning the lost girl from Judea. They called themselves Children of Israel, which, indeed, was true, but it misled the Edomites to suppose that they came from the more friendly Northern kingdom. It was noised about that they were

after the hundred shekels of gold which was offered as a reward. Wherever Amos, who was usually the spokesman of the two, made his inquiry he was answered with an amused smile that nothing was known of the girl. Sometimes the company in a tavern, or a group at a street corner or in the market place would raise a derisive laugh and tell the strangers to go search the royal harem at Jerusalem. Amos and his friend soon learned that it was the general opinion in Tophel that Ruth had been carried off by some one of the Jerusalem princes.

The excitement of the journey to Edom and the novelty of the first few days in Tophel had revived the spirit of Enoch-Benarad, and, with increasing vitality had brought a fresher hope. But as day after day ended in disappointment without shedding any new light on the problem which lay before them and on the solution of which depended his own happiness, as the clouds of disappointment again thickened and blackened before him, he passed once more into a despondent mood. The city of Tophel was becoming unbearable and both young men decided that it was useless to remain there for a longer time. Bozrah must yet be searched,

and then part of the surrounding country of Edom, but to Enoch-Benarad the prospect seemed dark and hopeless. Amos, however, was buoyed on by faith and the hope that at some future time, either near or remote, the cause would culminate in success.



CHAPTER VI.

RUTH.

THUS far we have followed the search into Edom and have seen how slender are the chances for its success. We will not go into the details of a letter which Amos now penned to his father and sent by a caravan passing northward to Bethel and Jerusalem; nor will we describe the joy and sadness which it occasioned at home. The father, Ben-Or, felt less hopeful of recovering his daughter than did Amos: but he was inclined to bow before the dispensation of a wiser providence, and to believe that all was ordained with benevolence as well as with wisdom. It is now time for us to turn away from the scenes and personages upon which we have hitherto dwelt, and to follow a new thread, which will to some extent unravel the mystery before us.

The last time that Ruth was seen in or about Tekoa was when she left home, on a certain afternoon, to carry a basket of food to the fold, where Amos and Boz were

watching the flocks. It was not thought strange that she did not return on the same night, for on several former occasions the brothers had given up their hut to her convenience, as the time was too late for her to return with safety. But on the next morning, when Amos came home for a supply of food, it was learned that she never reached the fold.

Ruth was not of a timorous disposition; and, as she set out on her walk on that fateful day, nothing was further from her mind than the thought of danger. Her life had never been overshadowed by any great sorrow. Her mother had died while she was yet a child, too young to realize the loss, and her subsequent life had been one of pleasantness and love. Besides a few hasty quarrels with her brother Joab, which passed over almost in a moment and were gone, and the little incidental disturbances unavoidable in every career, no trouble had ever ruffled the smooth, gentle, and joyous flow of her life. She saw the troubles of others and sympathized out of her own natural kindly disposition: but she had never learned from any experience of her own what trouble really was. Now, she was to

enter upon a new epoch of her existence: a new world was to open up before her, the world of misfortune and hardship. In a little while she will be able to sympathize with the unfortunate and sorrowful because she herself has experienced misfortune and sorrow. At this time, she had no fear or suspicion of mischance. How could she have, to whom fortune had never brought a reverse?

When she had come within about a mile of the fold, she saw four horsemen approaching from the northward. The two foremost were about fifty cubits in advance of the others. There seemed nothing peculiar about their appearance, and they might have been shepherds or farmers from a neighbouring village. As they rode up she stood aside to let them pass; but, instead of passing, they came up one on each side of her and drew up their horses. One addressed her and began asking questions about the distances to several neighbouring villages, and about the road to Hebron. Ruth noticed a strange accent in the man's speech, but he spoke so well that the accent did not awaken serious suspicion. When the other two came up and halted behind, she

was somewhat alarmed, but as the conversation of question and answer continued, it was so natural and easy she forgot her fright. The horses were now around her on three sides so that she could not be seen from the direction of the village. Her attention was absorbed by the speaker of the party, whom the others addressed as Geelam. He was evidently a stranger, but seemed unusually interested in the country.

Suddenly she was seized from behind by a man who had noiselessly slipped from his horse, and, before she could cry out, her mouth was stopped by a gag. She was bound and placed on the horse with Geelam, who was the leader of the party, and the four horsemen took a circuitous route to their retreat in the wilderness, bearing away their captive, who was now almost fainting with terror. The work had been done so quietly and orderly and thoroughly that it drew no attention from the village; and it was done in so easy and natural a manner that no one in the country around had noticed anything out of the ordinary to have occurred during the afternoon.

Who were the kidnappers? That is a question which has hitherto been of great

interest in the narrative. If Amos and his friend had been able to find the slightest clue as to who the kidnappers were or whence they came, it would, as they thought, have simplified the problem before them. But in the absence of such a clue, they were moving in a perplexity concerning which there seemed no possible illumination. At the point where our narrative left them at the close of the preceding chapter, they were about despairing of finding Ruth in Edom, but were thoroughly at a loss where next to direct their search.

But while they were in such a condition of bewildered discouragement they little knew how near they had approached to the object of their quest. The four horsemen who surprised and captured Ruth with such boldness and dexterity were men of Tophel, the city which had some years before superseded Bozrah as the headquarters of royalty in Edom. Two were officers of the king's guard, one was eminent in the king's secret service, and the fourth, the leader of the expedition, Geelam by name, was the chief eunuch in charge of the royal harem. Geelam was a shrewd man of keen intellect, who could comprehend a situation more read-

ily and truly than any other in the king's service. He had been several times employed on secret service for the king and proved himself so efficient that, when the Edomites were mustering to invade Judea, he was deemed the fittest and most reliable person to make a secret expedition into the enemy's country and to spy out the land around the important fortress of Tekoa. He and his three companions were riding around the hill to view the rampart and its site when they spied a Hebrew girl, tripping toward the wilderness with a basket on her arm. Geelam supposed that much might be learned from her about Tekoa and its garrison which could not be inferred from an outward survey of the situation. "At any rate," he said, "she will be a fair addition to queen Rebasephah's staff of servants."

On reaching their retreat in the wilderness, Ruth was lifted from the horse and placed on the ground and the gag was removed from her mouth. She was too weak from the shock of terror to cry out loud enough to be heard by any one who might attempt to rescue her. Geelam told her that if she remained quiet she need have no fear, for no harm would come to her and she

would be subject to no unnecessary rudeness. He was used to the work of caring for women, and his duties in the Royal harem had given him a courteousness and polish of manner and gentleness of speech, an attitude which easily impressed the girl with the belief that his character was not naturally one of violence. From his rougher companions the girl shrank in terror and naturally looked to Geelam for protection from their rudeness. She threw herself at his feet and begged him to let her return home. But when her at first passionate and then terror-stricken pleading would not avail, she sank back again weak from excitement and fear, and overcome by bewildered wonderment as to what the cause of her present captivity might be. She was, by this time, convinced that any further entreaty was useless; for although Geelam continued to display the same outward show of kindness and respect and courtesy, yet, back of it all she could perceive the cool steadiness of a carefully considered purpose, which she could bring no argument or intreaty to influence. In fact, his courteousness and outward polish were the result of long habitual use among the ladies of the king's house, while back of it

there was little feeling and nothing of passion but a keen intellect skillful in whatever subtle policy might gain or retain the Royal favor.

As soon as night fell, Ruth was bound once more on the horse with Geelam and the four horsemen set out for Edom. The distance was lengthened by a number of circuitous routes, which they were required to make in order to avoid certain folds and villages which lay along the way. Oh the weary journey! Ruth was naturally strong in body, but she was unused to that mode of travelling, and her position on the horse was somewhat uncomfortable. Mile after mile of the weary way was covered. Her strength was gone. She lay limp and helpless upon the horse, Geelam supporting her as best he could. How she suffered both in mind and body, and wished that death might come and end her misery at once! At the border of Edom a halt was made for rest. When morning broke the journey was resumed. Ruth was covered with a garment so that none could tell what the burden was which Geelam bore upon his horse; and, at last, the almost lifeless girl was presented to the Queen at Tophel. The three who accom-

panied Geelam were enjoined to be silent until the pleasure of the king should be known with regard to the captive.

Queen Rebasephah had been brought from Samaria with her servant Chephets, five years before. Geelam had visited Samaria on an embassy to the king of Israel; and, as he was always on the lookout for some new way of commending himself to the good graces of his royal master, seeing the beautiful girl Rebasephah, he negotiated for her marriage with the king of Edom, and, returning to his own country, he brought her and her servant along with him. Rebasephah at once became the king's favorite wife and queen of the Royal harem. She knew that she could only retain her position as mistress of the harem during the king's pleasure; and there always flitted before her a ghost of uncertainty, for at any time a fresh beauty appearing on the scene might supercede her in the king's favor.

This one great purpose the Queen never lost sight of,—that is, to retain the king's favor. Among the vain beauties of Samaria, she had been well trained in the art of coquetry; but, in her present position she never dared to exercise her charms except on

the king. However, there can be no doubt that she brought all the magic of her charms to bear upon him, and in a hundred ways small and great she plotted and planned and employed all her skill and beauty to strengthen her influence over her royal husband. If there was an official or favorite of the court who had any influence over the king, she gave him to understand that she was his best friend. Especially Geelam had received a great many favors. Her hands were freer in dealing with him, for there was no danger of exciting the king's suspicion by her partiality to the chief eunuch; and through her gracious services, Geelam had risen to almost the first place in the kingdom. Chephets, the Queen's old servant and nurse, who had cared for her in her infancy, was, of course, faithful to her because of long continued personal attachment; but since they had come into their present position she too was treated with especial kindness; and whatever other servants could be made useful were more highly favored under the present Queen than they had been under any other. In fine, through the influence which she had acquired, Rebasephah the queen was the real head of the kingdom; and she had no notion

of losing the power which she had thus so skilfully acquired.

Now it is not hard to understand why Geelam did not go directly to the king, but, first, brought his captive to Rebasephah the Queen. Exhausted as she was by her long rough ride and by the shock of terror which she had experienced, much of Ruth's robust beauty was momentarily gone; but the lingering marks of it were still too plain to escape the quick eye of Rebasephah. When that beauty, which was momentarily quenched should brighten again with returning strength, then, if the king should be allowed to see her, what might be the result? Queen Rebasephah had often pictured herself some such circumstance. In her imagination she had seen her own power and influence forsaking her and another taking her place as the king's favorite wife. The sight of Ruth awakened all her fears and she resolved that, at any cost, the king must not be allowed to see the new Hebrew captive.

She took Geelam into her confidence, as she had done on more than one similar occasion, and between them they devised a plan to confine the girl in one of the work-rooms of the harem under the care of

Chephets and another aged serving-lady of the Queen by the name of Meda. The latter, too, had received great favors from Rebasephah, and, like most of those who did the royal bidding, was not anxious for a change of Queens. The three men who had been present with Geelam and assisted in the kidnapping were bribed to keep silent; and the affair of Ruth's confinement in the harem was kept absolutely secret from all except those who were concerned in guarding her place of concealment. The plan which Geelam suggested was to look out for an opportunity to dispose of the captive by selling her to a foreign merchant, who would, doubtless, be willing to pay a large price for her, and who, at the same time would carry her far away from Edom and thus remove the danger which the Queen feared.

Meda was the needle-woman who superintended the making of the garments for the Royal wardrobes. Her own special apartments consisted of two adjoining rooms, which opened into the inner inclosed court of the harem. The rooms were also connected with one another by a door, which opened through the partition between them.

These rooms were now turned into a place of confinement for Ruth. The king would be as little likely to visit the sewing rooms as any other insignificant part of the harem, the more especially because Meda was of a less attractive personality than many other of the serving women. Here Ruth was left under the care of Meda and Chephets, and was made to accustom herself to the task of sewing, day after day, upon fine garments, under the direction of the expert needle-woman, Meda. At her home in Tekoa, Ruth had learned to do some fine work for the market, but she had never before applied herself continually to that kind of work for any length of time. The work was wearisome to her, as she had no especial liking for it; but it drew her mind from dwelling upon the bitter misfortune which had befallen her; and, for that reason, she applied herself to the task with all the energy which she could muster, and soon acquired a skillful hand.

It sometimes happened that the king visited all the rooms of the harem to see how things were progressing, or, perhaps, to show some distinguished visitor over the Royal houses. In the latter case, timely

warning would be given for some preparation must be made before all the apartments would be in a duly presentable condition. It was planned from the first, that, if the king should visit the rooms of the harem, he might be prevented from seeing Ruth. It was arranged that, if the king should move to visit the rooms, speedy notice should be given to the two women in charge of the fair prisoner and that, by strategy, she should be kept out of his sight. It has already been shown that, besides the doors which opened into the two rooms, there was a third door which connected the two together. It was planned that if the king should essay to enter one room, Ruth should be hurried into the other through the partition door; and again, as the king was entering the other room, she would be hurried back and the door closed; so that, in one room, the king would find only the old lady Meda, and, in the other, only the old lady Chephets. Thus, through the watchfulness of these two old female sharpers, the secret was closely and successfully kept. Ruth was soon able to divine the cause of her close confinement, and the thought made her as much afraid of the king as the Queen was afraid of her in-

fluence. She was as anxious to conceal herself from the king's sight as anyone in the harem, and, whenever a scheme was worked out for that purpose, she was the most eager that it should be a success. Thus it happened that while all Edom was in search of Ruth, though she was right in their midst, no trace of her could be found, and the king was compelled to return word to Amaziah that the lost girl was not in the kingdom of Edom.

It was the first time that Ruth had experienced a long separation from her home. She loved her home and she loved her freedom. She looked back over a life comparatively free from care, in the cottage at Tekoa, and the recollection of many happy hours spent with the dear friends in the home and in the village made her present confinement seem more burdensome to her. Would she ever again be restored to that home and those friends, or had she seen them for the last time? If she should never again be allowed to see that dear spot, among the associations of which all the tendrils of her affection were intertwined, then her future must indeed be desolate. She was not a girl of foolish sentiments,

and yet, in her present state of homesick desolation the separation from her lover was one of the greatest causes of her distress. Their attachment for one another had not been a quick and violent passion, but they had grown quietly and silently into each other's affections, and so naturally that they like two sapling oaks whose rootlets draw nourishment from the same soil, so near together that, if one is violently uprooted, the other will also be so thoroughly disturbed that it will lose its freshness and cease from its rapid and vigorous growth. But how about the future? Might not the oaklet, transplanted by violence from one soil to another, though it droops and wilts in its altered circumstances, become accustomed to the new soil, strike out new rootlets and again take on its former freshness?

Ruth pleaded until her courage and ambition were exhausted that she might be allowed to return to her home. She urged all the arguments by which one woman could appeal to another; and, indeed, they were not without their effect upon Queen Rebasephah. If Ruth could be forever gotten rid of by sending her home, the Queen would be very willing to comply with her wish in

that respect. Rebasephah even went so far as to consult with the chief steward of the harem as to the practicability of such a course. But the sagacious Geelam saw that it might endanger both the queen's head and his own. The disappearance of Ruth had awakened such a widespread popular interest both in Judea and in Edom that her restoration could not be secretly brought about. Since King Amaziah had taken the matter up with a good deal of vigor, it had become a national affair. If the girl were returned, it would certainly be found out that, after all, she had really been confined in Edom and in the Royal harem. King Amaziah would, in all probability, demand satisfaction, and what the result might be no one could tell. Since matters had gone thus far, the only safe course was to keep the secret of Ruth's captivity until some safer method should be revealed for disposing of her.

A few weary months wore away and Ruth, who had given up hope of making her escape in the near future, was becoming more and more accustomed to the new situation. Her close confinement and monotonous routine of duties had worn upon her system and robbed her of some of her beauty,

but she still retained enough to keep the alarm of Queen Rebasepah awake. The vigilance of her guardians was not allowed to slacken even for a moment. She was, however, treated with kindness, and in many ways she found her prison a not unpleasant place. And yet there were times when the old homesickness would come over her, when her early life and home happiness would rise up before her imagination with all the vividness of life, and when she would be brought to feel that her present confinement was a life of misery in comparison with what had gone before. But, through all, she was the same gentle, kindhearted girl, and her naturally lovable disposition conquered the hearts of those two elderly women who had been placed over her to act as her jailers. On one occasion when Geelam, alarmed at the danger which would attend a discovery of the secret, proposed that Ruth be spirited away at night and disposed of in a wilderness grave, both Chephets and Meda made intercession with the Queen to save their prisoner. But the time was come when something must be done with her; for there were signs of awakening suspicion among other women of the harem.

At one time, when the sunshine was playing pleasantly into the room where she was at work, Ruth climbed onto a stool and looked out of the high window over the beautiful scene which there presented itself. The spacious Royal court was paved, not with limestone, but with a living verdure, which hid the rich soil of the lawn. Flowerbeds, fountains, and the various out-of-door ornaments with which those early Orientals usually decorated their grounds produced an effect of beautiful, but withal artificial grandeur. But for all its beauty, Ruth thought that she would much rather see the bare hills of Tekoa and of the wilderness. There were two men on the road in the distance. Ruth hardly noticed them at first, but, as they came nearer, something drew her attention toward them. Just then Meda called to speak about some work and Ruth turned to her with a dizziness about her head. Then she cast another eager glance at the two men, uttered a cry and fell in a swoon. When she came to herself she was alone in the room. At first she wondered what the matter was. Then the recollection of what she had seen came back upon her; and, as quickly as she could, she

climbed to the window and looked out again, but the two men were gone. The reader will not be surprised to learn that on that same day, as Amos and Enoch-Benarad were passing at a little distance from the Royal harem, they heard a faint cry as of a woman's voice, but thought nothing of it and passed on. It was too far and too faint to recognize anything familiar in the voice.

In a minute more Meda returned with some water and some medicine, which she thought would revive the fainting girl, but she found the latter already recovered and again at the window. The manner in which she questioned Ruth as to the state of her health and what had caused the momentary swoon would show that Meda had a real and kindly interest in the girl's welfare. Ruth, however, did not think it wise to tell what was the real cause of her fit, and she attributed it to the heat of the sun on her head as she stood in the window.

"Then why do you stand there yet?" asked Meda.

Ruth stepped down from the stool and resumed her work; but Meda took it from

her and made her rest a little until she should be fully recovered from her faint.

From that time on, Ruth spent as much time as she could at the window in the hope of seeing her brother and her lover again. She thought that, if they should appear again, she might in some way attract their attention, and thus make them aware of her place of confinement. The two women who were her guardians remarked about how constantly she was at the window, and often wondered what had come over the girl. But Ruth never dared to tell the real reason why she looked so much out of the window; for she knew that she would be forbidden to do so, if anyone suspected that she was meditating an escape. Day after day she cast anxious looks toward all the streets which could be seen from her window: but she never saw what she was looking for. The truth of the matter is that the day on which Amos and Enoch-Benarad were seen from the window of Ruth's room was the last day which they spent in Tophel. On the morrow morning, they departed for Bozrah.

A complete and sudden change now came over the girl. During the long months

of her captivity she had grown to be somewhat contented in her new position: but the momentary sight which she had of Amos and his friend changed all that. There awakened again that great longing for her home and her kindred and her friends. Again she found her imprisonment unendurable; and now she felt that, if something should not happen to bring it to an end, she would not be able to live.

Then the end came. On one evening Meda came into the place of Ruth's confinement, appearing somewhat disturbed, and told her that she was to be sold. The poor girl was very much frightened at this intelligence; for, although she had longed for a change, this change was more likely to be for the worse than for the better. The months spent in these close rooms had been wearisome, but what hardships might the future hold!


As soon as darkness fell, Geelam and Chephets came into the room. They tied a bandage around Ruth's mouth, veiled her face and led her out of the harem. Another man was waiting outside and he and Geelam hurried her away through the darkness. After passing for a considerable distance, she

was placed in a covered vehicle where there were several other women. Again left with female attendants, she was made to lie down on a garment spread upon the floor of the carriage. Sleep, however, is not punctual in his appointments to visit us when our nerves are all unstrung with excitement. But as morning was drawing near she succeeded in falling asleep. When she was awakened by the jar of the moving carriage, the sun shone through an opening in the cover. She could now see her companions plainly; and she noticed that one was an elderly woman, whose features were not unlike those of the daughters of Abraham. The sounds without which accompanied the moving waggon, told her that she was travelling with a caravan.

When the caravan had passed beyond the confines of the kingdom of Edom, the bandage was removed from Ruth's mouth and she was allowed a moderate degree of freedom. She learned that she had been purchased by the husband of the elderly woman who was with her in the waggon. He was an Israelite, born in Samaria, but for many years had been a merchant residing among foreigners in the land of Syria.

CHAPTER VII.

ENOCH-BENARAD

F COURSE, the journey which Enoch-Benarad and Amos made into Edom ended in disappointment. We will not follow their wanderings to Bozrah, and other cities and towns of Edom. Returning to their homes weary and disheartened, they found their own land in strange disorder. There had been war. The jealousy which had long been growing between the two kingdoms, Israel and Judea, was brought to a crisis by the arrogant presumption of Amaziah. Elated by his success in Edom, Amaziah sent a challenge to the king of Israel, to meet him in a fair fight, and to decide the question as to which kingdom should be supreme over the other by a trial of arms. On the other hand, the king of Israel, though he knew his own strength to be superior to that of his brother king, was unwilling to lift his hand against the Southern kingdom. He was not a narrow-minded bigot like Amaziah: and he saw that

it was a wiser policy to avoid trouble than to search it out. In answer to the challenge, he sent to Amaziah a parable, warning him not to plunge himself into any further trouble. The king of Israel, in order to guard against the charge of cowardice, must assert his own superiority, and his answer to Amaziah to take the form of a warning. The following illustration which he used for this purpose, is more like a fable than a parable. "The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon saying, give your daughter to my son to be his wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon and trod down the thistle. You have indeed smitten Edom and your heart has lifted you up: Glory, therefore, and remain at home; for why should you meddle to your hurt, that you yourself should fall and Judea with you?"

This brief answer only aroused the anger of Amaziah. In the short war which followed, Amaziah was defeated and Jerusalem and Northern Judea were plundered. All those who were in any degree liberally minded believed that justice was on the side of the Northern kingdom, and that, as a re-

sult of the war, Amaziah had received a much needed lesson.

When they returned to Tekoa from Edom, both Amos and Enoch-Benarad were worn and weary. They had gone through many vicissitudes of excitement and despondency, of hope and disappointment. They had braved the dangers from robbers, which always threatened along lonely ways: they had suffered from toil, and hardship, and even from hunger: and, at last, they were compelled to flee from the country. When their adventures in Edom had thus come to an end, Enoch-Benarad felt that any further search was useless: and the thought made him gloomier than ever. The future seemed to hold nothing more of happiness for him. He could see no purpose in his future life sufficiently important to make that life worth the living. The future before him now seemed like a desolate desert, without a single oasis to gladden the eye, or a single shade to rest beneath, or a spring from which he might quench his steady thirst. A weariness came over the boy,—not so much a weariness of body as a weariness of spirit. Before the calamity came, although he was happy in the present, he had

lived largely in the future. His imagination had described before him the picture of a happy home; and toward the realization of that ideal his whole ambition had bent. But now, the light which cast that picture on the screen of futurity had vanished, and the picture vanished with it. The purpose upon which were concentrated both the energy and hope of his life was now gone, leaving nothing but emptiness and desolation.

Even in his disappointment and discouragement, however, Enoch-Benarad was anxious to continue the search, not so much through any hope of its success as for the sake of the travel and adventure which it would involve. It seemed to him that an idle life in and about Tekoa could no longer be borne. The only way, as he thought, by which his mind could now be redeemed from its morbid moodiness was by passing through continually changing scenes and stirring adventures. He urged hard upon Amos to set out without delay for Egypt, and to make enquiries there about the caravans which had come from the East during the preceding year. It was, however, of no avail; for Amos had duties at home, which must detain him for a long time to come.

On the failure of this plan, Enoch-Benarad contemplated joining the army of Amaziah; but this scheme, too was destined to prove abortive. On arriving at home, he learned of the disaster which had befallen the kingdom of Judea, and that, as a result, there was little likelihood of any further military activity in the Southern kingdom for, at least a number of years to come.

Arad was now more anxious than ever that his son should marry. He supposed that all Enoch-Benarad needed, in order to make his life a contented one, was to overcome that seemingly foolish stubbornness which led him to make an unnatural resolve. The father supposed that, if he could induce his son to yield in this, it would bring about the needed revolution in the boy's mind. Ben-Or and Amos and other friends of Enoch-Benarad, now, also advised him to comply with his father's wishes, to settle and be contented. But what was the use! It was not merely a stubborn resolve, which the young man had made, that induced so unpleasant a state of mind. On the contrary, it was the state of mind which had produced the resolve. There was a real feeling that something vital and essential to his

life had been removed; and the thought of replacing it by anything else was repulsive. The natural was gone, and any possible substitute seemed artificial and insufficient. No! He could not bear the thought of marrying now. The only course open to him was a life of activity and adventure.

When, at last, there could be no doubt that nothing would do but he must travel, his father Arad procured for him an equipment for trading with foreign countries, and made arrangements that he should join a caravan of merchants, passing from Jerusalem into Egypt. Then in a little while, as soon as the caravan was ready to move, Enoch-Benarad, with his laden camels and horses and his servants, joined it and began a career of travel.

For a number of years ensuing, under the direction of his experienced father, he plied the trade. He visited Egypt, Phœnicia, Syria, and the South coast. Five busy and prosperous years of changing scenes and changing circumstances worked wonders in the young man's mind. His old trouble had ceased to weigh heavily upon him. His sinews were toughened by constant exercise, and his face was bronzed by

the desert sun. He was now an active, shrewd and prosperous young trader, but with no more inclination for a settled life than that with which he had set out. During these years, he had acquired such a love for a wandering and adventurous life that constant movement and activity came to be, as it seemed, a very necessity of his existence.

And yet, although he felt that he must keep moving, the burdens of the mercantile career and the constant care and vigilance which that pursuit involved were becoming wearisome to him. By this time he wanted a change.

On returning home after the fifth year of his mercantile wandering, Enoch-Benarad learned that stirring events were transpiring in the Northern kingdom. The young monarch, Jeroboam II, had gained some brilliant victories across the Jordan and had annexed the land of Ammon to Israel. Enoch-Benarad became very much interested in that young and vigorous king, and in the military skill and daring which he had already shown. The young merchant of Tekoa was seized with a desire to share the fortunes of that dashing northern potentate. Five years

before, he had wished to enter upon a military instead of a mercantile career: but, at that time, the future of Judea promised nothing of military achievement: and the northern kingdom was at war with Judea. There was then no call for warriors at Jerusalem: and Enoch-Benarad would not fight against his own country. But now, the two kingdoms were at peace, and the promise was that Jeroboam would exert his arms against foreign nations, to extend the border of Israel. The now aged father Arad was unwilling that his son should expose himself to the danger which war always involves: but he had never interposed a serious obstacle to his son's will, and now, as at former times, he was brought to give an unwilling consent. Enoch-Benarad sold his equipment to a young neighbour, who had two years before married little Dinah, the daughter of Arnan the shepherd; and then he set out for Samaria.

Through the aid of influential friends in Samaria, Enoch-Benarad was enabled to secure a command as sub-captain in the army of Jeroboam II; and he at once began training for the vigorous work which that monarch was planning shortly to undertake.

Moreover, it was not long before the skill and daring of the new officer was put to the test. The Syrians were making an incursion into Israel: and the company which Enoch-Benarad had been appointed to command was a part of the expedition sent northward to meet the invading Syrians. A fierce battle took place at the Jordan above Lake Merom, which reddened the waters of the lake and sent the Syrians scurrying back to their own land. Enoch-Benarad showed a courage and energy in the fight which not only won for him the admiration and respect of his own men, but also commended him to the favor of the chief commander of the force, and, afterwards, to the favor of the king.

In this narrative, we will not follow the career of conquest by which Jeroboam extended his kingdom to the East, to the West, and toward the North. After five years of almost constant fighting, we pick up again the thread of Enoch-Benarad's story. The hosts of Israel are marching on Damascus. A great battle has been fought, on the banks of the Pharpar River, in which the Syrians were again routed with great slaughter. But, though defeated on the Pharpar, they re-

assembled at Damascus, doubly reinforced, to make a determined resistance. As the hosts of Israel were drawing near to Damascus, Enoch-Benarad and the two hundred horse, which he now led, were following in the rear of the main army, with orders to watch the brushwood to the right and to be ready for instant action. It was expected that the Syrians would there prepare an ambush to surprise the invaders. The situation furnished such an excellent opportunity for an ambush that the chief captain of the army of Israel knew well that the Syrians could not resist the temptation. And so it proved. Enoch-Benarad saw the first movement among the bushes and charged before the foe came in sight. His two hundred horse met the Syrians as they came into the open field, and the surprise was really turned on the latter. The oncoming Syrians were thrown into disorder by this sudden charge, and rallied only when the main army of Israel had halted and was ready to give them battle. The next move of the Syrians was in flight, and they took shelter within the walls of Damascus, where the remainder of their forces were intrenched. The host of

Israel approached and encamped around the city.

After two weeks of siege, the Syrians determined to come out with their whole force and to give battle. The sally was made at night. But this attempted surprise also failed. On the next morning, the field of battle was strewn with dead of both nationalities, and the surviving Syrians were again within the walls of the city. But now, as his cause was hopeless, the king of Syria made haste to surrender. He humbled himself before Israel, took the oath of submission, and promised that he and all his subjects would become servants of Jeroboam and pay a regular annual tribute. After this unreserved submission, the city of Damascus was spared: and, though the host of Israel entered in triumph, the soldiers were forbidden to plunder the inhabitants.

At the request of the Syrian king, a guard was placed on the battle field to protect those who wished to remove their dead. Enoch-Benarad was riding over the field superintending both the guard and the grave-diggers. A party of Israelites with spades are at work in one part of the field,

while others are carrying the dead to the graves. There are also Syrians at work on the field. Some of their dead are being buried, while the remains of others are being carried into the city to be prepared for the tomb. There are women and children weeping over the bodies of husbands and fathers and brothers. A number of people are searching the field for bodies which are not so easily found.

Enoch-Benarad was especially attracted by a woman, whom he saw at a distance, hurrying from place to place, apparently making an anxious search. At last, she came upon the body which she had been looking for and knelt down beside it. Enoch-Benarad, as he moved in the discharge of his duties, approached nearer and nearer to where the woman was weeping over the dead warrior. There was something about her appearance which drew his attention away from all other objects of interest. She reminded him of a former period of his life and of one who had been long since lost, but who, a dozen years before, had been all in all to him. It would be difficult to describe the thoughts which were passing through the young officer's mind at this

time. Still, he was drawing nearer and nearer to the person who had so strangely influenced him. At last, she lifted her face so that he could see her plainly, and he knew her to be Ruth. In a little while he was off his horse and by her side.

But eleven years and a beard will sometimes make a considerable difference in a man's appearance. Ruth gave a start of surprise and alarm when she saw the strange officer beside her. Enoch-Benarad, seeing that he was not recognized, assured her that she need have nothing to fear, and offered to provide assistance, if she needed any, to carry the body into the city. Ruth was very grateful for the offer, and thanked the man, as with many sobs she told him that it was her husband, who had been killed in the battle. Since his servant had accompanied him into the fight and, likewise, had never returned, there was none left to carry the dead husband except herself and three little children. After he had expressed his sympathy for her trouble and assured her that she would be given all the needed assistance, he spoke to her even more kindly, calling her by her own name. Ruth again started, and, now for the first time,

looked straight into his face. Nothing had been further from her expectation than to meet an old acquaintance in this time of distress. But on looking more closely at him, her memory, too, was revived and she knew that her former lover was before her. Their early forced separation, the years that had passed, and her own marriage in Syria had broken that relation between them; but it could not destroy the friendly feeling and mutual regard which each had for the other.

Enoch-Benarad saw that it would be best to leave her for a little, until she should recover from her surprise and have time to think. He said to her, "We are both of us surprised at this meeting. I will go and bring some men to carry your dead husband to the city." So saying, he went away, and, presently, returned with three of his trusty followers. He gave them orders to carry the dead man to wherever the woman should direct, and to remain on guard before her house until he himself should be free from his duties of the day. Then, promising to see Ruth again as soon as possible he went away.

We will pass over the days that followed with only a moment's glance. Enoch-

Benarad saw Ruth every day and gave her all the assistance which she needed in the management of her affairs. He soon learned the story of her captivity and marriage. The earlier part of the story is already known to the reader. After she was taken into the land of Syria, she found herself a servant in the household of the elderly Israelite who had purchased her from Queen Rebasephah. She had no means of communicating with her old home: but the service was agreeable to her, in the main, and she soon won for herself a place of esteem in the household of her master. Her master's son was then growing to the years when young men of that time usually consorted for life. He loved Ruth and begged his father to give her to him in marriage. For a long time, Ruth, constrained by the memory of her former attachment, withheld her consent to the union. But she liked the young man for his noble qualities, and, at last, was induced to yield. He was a kind and brave youth and she soon became very fond of him. Her thoughts were gradually weaned away from her own home in Tekoa. In the course of time, a child was born, and the mother forgot her desire to return to her

early home in the happiness of her new domestic life.

Her husband was of Israelitish parents: but he himself had been born in Syria and the whole of his life had been spent in that land. It was natural that he should adhere to the land of his nativity, rather than to that of his parents. In regard to the lesser border fights, which were continually occurring between Syria and Israel, Ruth's sympathy had been with the latter country, and her influence kept her husband from participating in these troubles. But when, at last, the invasion of Jeroboam threatened Damascus and her own home and children, Ruth withdrew her opposition and allowed him to volunteer. In fact, it would have been useless for her to object now; for the call to arms was so pressing that a strong young man would by no means be allowed to escape it. When the war ended, Ruth was a widow, and Enoch-Benarad took upon himself the task to act as her protector and guardian.

When the host of Israel retired from Damascus, a garrison was left for a time in that city, under the charge of Enoch-Benarad. A man of the retiring army was en-

gaged as messenger to Tekoa to carry the news of Ruth's discovery to Amos and his brother. Ben-Or had passed to his final rest. Ruth wept on learning of her father's death: and, now that her husband was gone, the longing came over her to see her brothers and her old home. She now learned for the first time that her brother Joab had been killed in the war with Edom shortly after she herself had been forcibly carried into that country.

At last, the garrison of Israelites was ordered to return home and to leave the city in charge of its own king, who was now a sworn servant of Jeroboam. Enoch-Benarad sent another messenger to inform Amos that he was about to return to Samaria and that Ruth had decided to return with him. She had now no especial ties to bind her to her home in Damascus. Her husband's father and mother had both died some time before the late war. All that had kept her in Syria was now removed, and she yielded to the persuasion of Enoch-Benarad to return to her own land. By this time she had yielded to his entreaty in another respect, as will soon appear. She and her children were conveyed to Samaria, accompanied and pro-

tected by the retiring garrison led by Enoch-Benarad.

When they arrived at Samaria, Amos was already there and waiting for them. He had also been able to secure a cottage for their convenience, that they might make themselves comfortable without delay. He had changed in certain incidental respects during the dozen years of Ruth's absence. He was stouter now and had a black beard: but in all other essentials his appearance was the same. Ruth needed no second glance to recognize her brother. The warm, affectionate nature of Amos broke from its habitual self-control as he greeted his long lost sister. Ruth, too, was overcome with emotion. Both had been looking forward with anxious expectation to this happy time of meeting.

"Would that our father were alive," said Amos, "to experience the joy of this hour. He fell asleep contented, trusting his lost daughter to the care of Jehovah; but this happiness would have made his bed more restful as he passed into his long sleep. He was not so hopeful as I that we would find you again. After the first few months

of your absence, he gave up his expectation of ever seeing you again in this world."

On the mention of her father, Ruth sobbed again: but still, with her head drooping, she listened to the words of her brother. "I did not think that I would ever see any of you again," she said. "I gave up hope long, long ago: but my sorrow Damascus has brought me the happiness to see again my brothers and friends."

"The plans of Jehovah are too large and intricate for us to understand," said Amos. "I never could give up hope that you would be restored to us. Yea, I was sure it would come about. The faith continued in my mind, even when it seemed contrary to reason. I could not understand how it came, but was sure that Jehovah was in some way speaking to my soul. The faith persisted in my mind. I believed and could not help believing, through all these years, that you would at last be found. I told Enoch-Benarad how it was. I knew then, and he will believe now, that it was the voice of Jehovah."

Then there were many questions to be asked and answered. What most surprised

Ruth and led her to realize how long the time of her absence had been was to learn that little Jakorath was a grown woman now, and married in Tekoa. Ramah, the brother of Jakorath was travelling with a caravan and beginning a trader's career. A great many other interesting pieces of information were related on both sides: and Ruth looked forward with the anticipation of a great deal of pleasure to the time when she would visit the scenes of her childhood.

Then followed the wedding. At that time a marriage consisted in nothing more nor less than a contract between two families, or between the groom and the family of the bride, and witnessed by an elder and by several other people. Amos acted the part of Ruth's guardian in the ceremony, and gave up the bride to her future husband. As soon as it could be done, Enoch-Benarad gave up his position in the army of Jeroboam: and the happy couple returned to Tekoa, and took up their abode with the aged Arad, whose remaining days must now be few.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROPHET.

ON ONE Sabbath, shortly after Enoch-Benarad and his bride had taken up their residence in Tekoa, they repaired to the high place of worship, with the assembling congregation. It is a necessity for any intensely religious people that they have local sanctuaries where regular assemblies might be held for worship. During the period of the nation's history which followed the exile, although sacrifice at the high places had long since ceased, the local sanctuaries were again re-established and were called synagogues. At the time to which our story belongs, there was nothing idolatrous or evil in connection with the worship at the high place of Tekoa. It is true that minor sacrifices were made there at the altar; but this practice was being more and more discouraged. The high place was now almost wholly devoted to the purpose of congregational worship. It was the practice of all good people to meet together once a

week to join in the prayer which was offered by an elder and to listen to an address of exhortation.

Enoch-Benarad and Ruth had a good deal to be thankful for, and it was with good reason that they joined the congregation of worshippers on this Sabbath day. Their hearts were full of gratitude and happiness, and they desired to return thanks unto Jehovah for the way in which he had led them.

The speaker on this occasion was to be no other than Amos himself. Ruth had heard since her return to Tekoa of her brother's piety and eloquence from several people who spoke highly in his praise. There was no paid preacher in Tekoa. The only two hired officials were the two Levites who taught children and had the care of the place generally. The sabbath prayers and addresses were made by elders, who took turns in performing this duty. Although Amos was yet a young man, he had been called on many times to speak on the Sabbath: and he had now come to be known as the most finished orator in Tekoa. Ruth had in her early life known her brother to be a boy of unusual earnestness and

piety, with a strong religious tendency in his nature. She also knew that he had some gifts in the line of persuasion: and she was anxious now to hear him.

After the incense was burned upon the altar and the prayer was offered, Amos mounted the stone platform in the midst of the congregation and looked around upon his audience. The solemn and earnest prayer which had been offered by a venerable elder of Tekoa had indeed brought the spirits of the people into a worshipful mood, and they stood awed as if conscious that Jehovah was near them. It was the custom among orators to make an historical introduction and to begin with Abraham or still further back. Amos did not follow this custom. He began by dwelling on the goodness of Jehovah, as revealed in the fact that he had sent prosperity to the people of Tekoa. It was a subject upon which Amos was always accustomed to wax eloquent, and now the more because his lost sister had been restored. Then he drew in contrast a delineation of the people's indifference, in that they neglected to render due thanks to Jehovah, and in that they so often neglected the duties which he required of them. The

address was beautiful and eloquent and full of ample pictorial illustrations, which Amos had taken mainly from his own experience and observation. Then, after a direct exhortation and appeal to the people of Tekoa, he broadened out and dwelt on the religious and moral condition of Judea in general. He lamented the decadence of real prophecy. He claimed that the prophecy of the time was artificial and not real, and that many of the prophets had no right to the title; for they were not speaking the true will of Jehovah, no voice had come to them from the unseen deity, and they were merely praters for bread and butter. He made reference to the late death of the aged priest Ahiah, a man who feared Jehovah and who prayed earnestly for an awakening of the prophetic spirit. Then he made a brief reference to the growing vice in the northern kingdom, and prayed that Jehovah would interpose his hand to check its increase and to save the nation. The address ended with an earnest appeal to the people of Tekoa.

During the years which preceded and those which followed this incident, Amos was occupied alternately with the care of the flock, the care of the orchard, and with mar-

keting the produce of both. During the days in which he might be released from the care of the flock, it was his duty to find a market for the cloth, thread, wool and fruit which were produced that season, and also for whatever sheep and lambs could be spared to the market. A ready sale for this produce was often to be found at Jerusalem; but on some occasions there would be a glut in the Jerusalem market and he would be compelled to seek some city or town further to the north. A market for cloth and thread and for sheep could usually be found in any city or town of the Northern kingdom; for the fertile soil to the north was given up mainly to the cultivation of fruit and grain. Thus it happened that Amos often made a journey into Israel, sometimes going as far north as Samaria.

Even when the reign of Jeroboam II began, religion and morality were in a very lax condition in the kingdom of Israel. At all times the Northern kingdom was worse than the Southern in this respect. At first, however, Amos had little occasion to notice such a state of affairs during his brief trips toward the North. The evil was not then so general, nor displayed with such shameless-

ness as at a later time. The dark reports which strayed southward were only partly credited by people of a southern village like Tekoa. When the prosperity of Jeroboam was rapidly on the increase, the enthusiasm of Amc was awakened and he spoke highly in praise of the Northern kingdom, and the more so because his friend Enoch-Benarad had joined the army of that kingdom and was fighting in its cause.

But along with the military success and the growing wealth of the country there was also the rapid increase of vice. Foreign captives and foreign customs were brought in by the soldiers. The increasing wealth was eagerly sought after and accumulated in the hands of those who through their shrewdness or their position were able to wrench it away from the others. The rich were proud and arrogant in their worldly prosperity, while the poor were ground down into the very earth. Property was wrenched from the poor by fraud and extortion, and they were left with almost no means of procuring bread. Moreover, the society of the land became corrupted by all manner of vice, and even the places consecrated to the worship of Jehovah were desecrated by the same forms of sensu-

ous immorality which formed so conspicuous a part of the worship among the surrounding heathen.

When Amos became aware of the real state of society and of religion in that prosperous Northern kingdom, he was horror-stricken. To his mind, sin was connected with punishment as an invariable result. What he saw was not only a corrupted people, but hovering above them was the rod of an angry Jehovah, which must surely fall with deadly violence. "And is there no prophetic voice," he thought, "to warn the people of their danger? Why does not such an awful state of things call forth the thunder of Jehovah's warning? But who is to bear the message? The prophets, like the people, have all gone astray. They grovel before the rich and preach against the oppressed: and to their grossest falsehoods they dare to attach the authority of Jehovah's name. They say, 'thus saith the Lord:' but the message which they bring is from their own wicked hearts.

Amos brooded over the wretched state of the people of Israel and mourned for their degeneracy as if they were his own nearest kinsmen. For days, for weeks, for months,

and even for years it seemed that nothing could be done. There seemed to be no man who was qualified to lift his voice in warning to the people. At last, the thought came into his mind that it might be his own duty to bear Jehovah's message to the Northern kingdom. At first, the thought came with such suddenness that it startled him. He felt that he was so unequal to the task that he could not really be the chosen messenger of God. He tried to put the thought from him, but it persisted in his mind and grew stronger and stronger. It came still more plainly to him that it was his duty to speak to the wandering people of the North. At last, he decided to go. There was no more doubt that the thought which arose in his mind and persisted with such stubbornness was the voice of Jehovah: and he left his flock and set out for the North.

The scene of his preaching was Bethel. It was at Bethel that the various forms of idolatry became more conspicuous than in any other sanctuary of Israel, and there idolatry received the patronage of Royalty. The sacred feasts were made drunken carousals, and all manner of vice was mingled with the worship.

It was a bold step for a stranger to stand up in the market place or before the sanctuary of Bethel, and to face the most powerful and wealthy men of Israel with such fearful denunciations as he uttered. There was a crowd of humble and oppressed people who listened eagerly to his words; but that only served to increase the sullen wrath of the ruling class. At last, Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, came to Amos and ordered him to leave the city. The priest accused Amos of working on the feelings of the people in order to get money from them, and told him jeeringly to go back to his own land and earn his living there.

Now the conduct of this priest shocked Amos more than anything else at Bethel. He knew that the direst punishment must attend such conduct in one who professed to be a priest of Jehovah. He turned upon Amaziah with the righteous anger of Jehovah glowing in his countenance. He denied a mercenary motive. He disclaimed any relation or connection with the false prophets of the land—some of the very people whom he had been denouncing. Then thoughts again began to flash into his mind with such clearness that he recognized in them the voice of

Jehovah: and he gave utterance to them as they came. Fixing his eye on Amaziah, the priest and raising his hand he said: "Now, therefore, hear the word of Jehovah. You say prophesy not against Israel and drop not your word against the house of Isaac; therefore, thus saith Jehovah: your wife will be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, and your land will be divided by line; and you yourself will die in a land that is unclean, and Israel will surely be led away captive out of her land."

Under the direct gaze of Amos the priest slunk away, but with a sullen hatred toward the prophet, and a determination to balk his purpose. From that time on, the opposition became more determined. Disturbances were made whenever the prophet appeared, and his life was threatened. At last, Amos was compelled to withdraw from Bethel. He retired to his home in Tekoa and pursued his humble duties, but with the full assurance that certain destruction awaited the wicked people of the North.

THE END.

Appended Note:—The locality of Tophel is unknown. The mention in Deut. 1:1 probably refers to the whole of Edom. The name of a leading city was sometimes applied in that way to all the country around. It may be that the name of Tophel was changed to Teman in later times.



